

A FRIEND OF GOD

Hebrews 11:8-10, 17-19

Abraham is the most illustrious person in ancient history and one of the colossal characters of all time. Other names have come down to us from those early days, but Abraham's name stands out among them as the moon stands out in a star-filled sky. If for nothing else, Abraham would commend our notice because he was called the "Friend of God" and the "Father of the faithful." In Isaiah 41:8 God said: "But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend." Abraham is the only person whose name is found in the Old Testament whom God called His friend.

Surely it will be good for us to study the life and conduct of this great man, in order that we, too, may become friends of God, to whom He will make known His will. Abraham's biography is very interesting and instructive. It contains numerous practical lessons for all who would obey and serve God.

I. The Story.

While Abraham was living quietly in Ur of the Chaldees, supervising the company of servants who were looking after his large flocks and herds, in some mysterious way there came to him a call 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 form in which this summons came from God, but it was very explicit, and the patriarch recognized it as being divine.

To Abraham God said, "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.

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.

Along with that sovereign and gracious call of God 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 will. Those who honor Christ will be blessed and honored by the Father.

When Abraham received his call, 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 it was necessary for him to listen and to 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.

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.

On the strength of what God had said to him, Abraham promptly and without asking any questions started on his pilgrimage. He did not know where he was going, but he knew that God had called him, that God was leading him, and he firmly believed that God would provide for him. When God guides, He always provides.

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 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.

At the call of God Abraham left his country and started for the promised land, Canaan, but, when he had gone about one-half the distance, he stopped in Haran. In disobedience to God Abraham took his father and his family along with him. They spent about six years in Haran, but they were wasted years. Haran was the place of temptation, incomplete surrender, wasted years and death. There is not any record of Abraham building an altar, receiving any revelation or any encouragement from God, or having any personal victory, progress or joy while he remained in Haran. Neither the place of disobedience nor 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, here in this strange land!

After God took Terah, he again called upon Abraham to go into Canaan, so he and his family proceeded to the land of promise. Abraham did not leave any member of his family or any of his substance in the place of compromise. If either had been left, most likely Abraham would have been tempted to return. He took all with him for use in the service of God. Back in Canaan he received God's promise of a son and God's gift of a son.

II. The Significance.

The significance of Abraham's experience is told in our text. It was an experience of faith.

1. By faith Abraham obeyed God.

"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went." In the Greek the negative says that Abraham himself knew that he did not know whither he went. He not only did not know, but he knew that he did not know. And yet he went. Here was faith functioning in the realm of the unknown and the unseen. His was an obedience of faith.

2. By faith Abraham lived in the land of promise.

"By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange land." Abraham lived in the land of promise, but it was a strange land. He did not build a city, but he lived in a tent, which signified that he was a stranger and a pilgrim in this world. The Bible says: "For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." By faith Abraham looked beyond the seen to the unseen and the hoped-for or the heavenly Jerusalem. His experience may be described in the lines:

"I am a stranger here, without a foreign land,
My home is far away, upon a golden strand."

3. By faith Abraham offered up his son.

"By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure."

After long wanderings and numerous trials, and Abraham had arrived at the place and time when it appeared that he could enjoy a season of prosperity and happiness. Just when he thought his greatest trials were over, instead, he was subjected to the supreme test. Quite frequently severe tests follow immediately the times of special or unusual blessing, as many have learned from experience.

It took the Lord sixty years to prepare Abraham for this test. The Lord never puts us to a severe test until we are ready for it. He never sends a trial until He has made preparation for us to come through victoriously. "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (I Corinthians 10:13). What a tremendous comfort this is to us!

If God had asked Abraham to sacrifice his son before this time, he would not have been ready for it. So God waited for over sixty years, while He passed Abraham through the fires of trial after trial, until the patriarch was finally ready to gain the victory and to earn the names, the "father of the faithful" and the "friend of God." During all those long years it had been one test after another, but each one made Abraham a bit stronger. Each experience in the overruling providence of God was preparing him for this final victory. Abraham was ready at last. On his part there was no quibbling, no repining, no arguing and no asking questions. In the entire chapter there was not a single word of discontent. In all the fulness of mature faith Abraham believed God. He was willing to take his son and to place him upon the altar in order that he might please Him Who called him from darkness into light.

III. The Sequel.

The sequel of Abraham's experience is striking.

1. Abraham was accounted righteous.

When Abraham lifted his hand to take the life of his son, and the blade flashed in the sunlight, he heard the voice he knew so well saying, "Abraham lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him, for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me." "And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son." There was a real offering in Abraham's will, but not a real death of Isaac. Concerning this incident Romans 4:3 says: "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted unto him for righteousness."

2. Abraham received his son of promise.

Because Abraham believed in God's power to restore Isaac, he received him. Because Abraham was prepared to give God his very best, God interposed and stayed Abraham's hand and set His seal upon the faith of His servant. The mark of the true believer is that he does not withhold anything from God.

3. Abraham was rewarded for his works.

In James 2:21 we read, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?" As a sinner Abraham was justified by faith, but as a professing believer he was justified by the work which his faith produced. His obedience was the expression of his faith. True faith always works itself out in obedience.

4. Abraham witnessed for God.

James 2:23 says: "And the scripture was fulfilled with saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.

5. Abraham rejoiced in Christ.

Christ said: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day" (John 8:56). Abraham's faith looked beyond the unseen and saw Christ. True faith does not stop short of Christ.

Abraham's feat of faith brings a needed message to this matter-of-fact world. It tells us that Abraham obeyed God to go where God wanted him to go and to do what God wanted him to do, that he lived in the present with his eyes on the future, that he trusted God when and where he could not see and in the thing for which he hoped.

If this is faith -- in functioning and feat -- how much faith have we?

Faith is in the world but not of the world. Christ's men are in the world but not of the world. It is by faith that Christ's men will show who and what they are.

May God give us the faith that functions as Abel's and Enoch's and Noah's and Abraham's.

God help us to ask and to have the faith that overcomes the world.