

Abraham 2 - Learning to Trust God

Right from the outset in looking at Abraham's life last week, we were presented with a Godly man who has spiritual challenges and struggles. This is again a demonstration of the fact that the Bible is from God. It is not just a collection of morality lessons where the hero overcomes one problem after another by always having the right answer and no sign of being human. Just because people have major spiritual victories doesn't mean that they're free and clear of problems. In fact, the struggles you face might be the same ones as well as new ones. All of them, however, involve putting our self aside and putting God and ministry first. Notice that I didn't say putting *others* first but putting *ministry* first. That is a different formulation than what we usually think.

Putting others first is the usual way we phrase the challenge of putting self last. This is easily done by just holding a door for someone, letting someone with a smaller order go before you in a shopping line, waiting to let someone finishing talking before you speak, etc. These are all fine and life would be greatly improved if everyone did this. But Christians need to, as Chef Emeril likes to say, kick it up a notch. We need to think in terms of ministry. I don't want someone to merely think I am nice, I want them to realize that in before I grew spiritually, it was easier to give in to temptation. I could be mean, but the reason I can be nicer now is because of Jesus. I want them to discover Jesus and a new life in Him, too. Bam! We were at the mall with our granddaughter when we saw some Marine recruiters. Nancy loves to let military people know how she appreciates their service to the country. Now that's fantastic...but, Bam! She kicks it up a notch and has tracts available for them. Our granddaughter was with her and when she saw the tracts, *she* wanted to be the one to give them the tracts. Bam! They thought she was great and thought she was wonderful. Bam! Our granddaughter was so cute, but, Bam! Taking time with people, consoling them, encouraging them, challenging them is good, but Bam! Did you bring them closer to God? I am not as concerned about people's *self*-esteem as I am concerned about their *God*-esteem. This is a concept that you should notice in all the events in the life of God's servants.

The particular challenge for Abram as the servant of God in the Scripture we are going to look at today is Abram learning to trust God. At the end of Genesis chapter 11 and the beginning of chapter 12, we saw Abram's struggles in order to forsake all. Now comes the next challenge for him.

1. Abram's rationale

Gen 12:10 And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine *was* grievous in the land.

Abram had been promised by God that He was going to be given Canaan land and that God was going to make him great. Not having any Wawas, QuickChecks, or Seven-Elevens along the way on an interstate highway system required a lot of moment by moment faith in the sustaining hand of God. Abram had to be a man familiar with living by faith. When the famine came in the land, Abram did what any *reasonable* man would do. He sized up the situation, took matters into his own hands, and left God's promise behind. Going down to Egypt is not a positive thing in the Bible. God told Isaac to make sure to not go down to Egypt when *he* faced famine. Isaiah told the Jews not to go to Egypt for help. Going down to Egypt was a sign of worldly trust. This is not the only next time that Abram would fall short. The problem is with Abram doing what is *reasonable*. He used his own reasoning. He did all the calculations of the pros and cons that he was willing to think of. We often quote Proverbs:

Prov 3:5-7 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

6In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

7Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil.

There is nothing so wrong about being reasonable as long as you make sure that your reason is well informed. There is no mention of Abram going to God in prayer. Our assumption that he did not do so is not so far off in the light of what he did next.

Gen 12:11-13 And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know that thou *art* a fair woman to look upon:

12Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This *is* his wife: and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive.

13Say, I pray thee, thou *art* my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee.

At about 65 years of age, Sarai was quite a good looking woman. Abram next reasoned that someone might want to kill him and take her. He reasoned that if they thought they had a fair chance to get her, they might not be so quick to get

rid of *him*. If she said she was his sister, this might work out. It's not even though she was not exactly his sister; we read elsewhere that she is actually his half-sister. Sure enough, the people thought she was beautiful and told Pharaoh to check her out.

Gen 12:14-16 And it came to pass, that, when Abram was come into Egypt, the Egyptians beheld the woman that she *was* very fair.

15The princes also of Pharaoh saw her, and commended her before Pharaoh: and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house.

16And he entreated Abram well for her sake: and he had sheep, and oxen, and he asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she asses, and camels.

2. God's grace

At this point God steps in with His grace:

Gen 12:17-20 And the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai Abram's wife.

18And Pharaoh called Abram, and said, What *is* this *that* thou hast done unto me? why didst thou not tell me that she *was* thy wife?

19Why saidst thou, She *is* my sister? so I might have taken her to me to wife: now therefore behold thy wife, take *her*, and go thy way.

20And Pharaoh commanded *his* men concerning him: and they sent him away, and his wife, and all that he had.

As you read this, you might still be waiting to see exactly how God was being gracious as you read about great plagues. There are things we might guess at here, but perhaps Pharaoh being as great as he was needed something big to get his attention or else God could just have destroyed him to get him out of the way. You might recall that a later Pharaoh brought himself to destruction when he failed to respond to the first plagues Moses brought his way. God was also being gracious to Abram. Abram's handling of the matter was going sideways fast and getting out of control as Pharaoh was getting his wife.

Heb 12:5-13 And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:

6For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

7If ye endure chastening, God

dealeth with you as with sons;
for what son is he whom the
father chasteneth not?

8But if ye be without
chastisement, whereof all are
partakers, then are ye bastards,
and not sons.

9Furthermore we have had
fathers of our flesh which
corrected *us*, and we gave *them*
reverence: shall we not much
rather be in subjection unto the
Father of spirits, and live?

10For they verily for a few days
chastened *us* after their own
pleasure; but he for *our* profit,
that *we* might be partakers of his
holiness.

11Now no chastening for the
present seemeth to be joyous, but
grievous: nevertheless afterward
it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of
righteousness unto them which
are exercised thereby.

12Wherefore lift up the hands
which hang down, and the feeble
knees;

13And make straight paths for
your feet, lest that which is lame
be turned out of the way; but let
it rather be healed.

Pharaoh should have been thanking God for the plagues. Hebrews talks about God's people being chastised and you might include Pharaoh here. He was not opposed to God and the plague he received was a blessing. Moses should have thanked God for shaming him.

God's judgment doesn't have to be the only kind of blessing in disguise. There are many things we go through that seem so bad but are just a blessing in disguise. Just randomly searching the internet comes up with these situations that might have looked to these anonymous people as God's disfavor at first.

A blessing in disguise for me was my stay in a psychiatric unit. After seeing the struggles of some of the people there because of drug use, it allowed me to empathize with my older brother who was a heroine addict. It helped me forgive him for what he did to my family and how he treated my mom. The resentment I had towards him had been such a big weight on my shoulders, but through that experience it was lifted.

Having quite possibly the worst job ever [was my blessing in disguise]. It was downright laughable how bad it was. But I needed it; anything less than outright torture and I would've stayed in a field that was wrong for me. However, since it was absolutely torture, I finally had enough and quit, and found a career field that I absolutely love.

Abram had put his self interest first and almost brought disaster into his life. What is glaringly absent is his ministry opportunity with Pharaoh. In spite of that, God was gracious in his judgment and brought Abram back into Canaan.

3. Abram's trust

We next move on to Genesis 13. Abram is back in the Promised Land and calling on God.

Gen 13:1-4 And Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south.

2And Abram *was* very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold.

3And he went on his journeys from the south even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Hai;

4Unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the LORD.

In contrast to all that Abram had just gone through, he has a new situation where he takes a step back, puts self-interest last, and leaves a matter in the hands of God. Perhaps all that Abram had gone through served to teach him a few things. Trusting God works so much better.

Gen 13:5-9 And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents.

6And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together.

7And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle: and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land.

8And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we *be* brethren.

9Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if *thou wilt take* the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if *thou depart* to the right hand, then I will go to the left.

With the strife between their herdsmen, Abram offers Lot the choice of which land to take. Abram could have tried to manipulate the situation keeping in mind how he might best take advantage of the circumstances, but he doesn't. Abram might have been thinking about how this would help Lot in the end, but at least he was able to step back and let God work. He knew what he was

at stake, as is revealed by Lot's reckoning.

Gen 13:10-13 And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it *was* well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, *even* as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar.

11Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other.

12Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched *his* tent toward Sodom.

13But the men of Sodom *were* wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly.

By offering Lot his choice, Abram knew that he might get left with the short part of the deal. Because he left the matter out of his hands, God blessed him.

Gen 13:14-18 And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward:

15For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.

16And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, *then* shall thy seed also be numbered.

17Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.

18Then Abram removed *his* tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which *is* in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the LORD.

We should be careful with our stewardship and not be wasteful, but at some point it is possible to cross the line to being a controller. If we are of a ready mind to serve God no matter what, we will always be in a position to let God work. It comes down to a matter of trust. If there is any question about the blessing of putting others first and trusting that God will bless, you only have to look at what happened to Lot. We will cover more of his sojourn in Sodom later on, but right away you can see the effect of the *me-first* attitude:

- He lifted up his eyes: he was eager.
- He chose what he deemed was best.
- He pitched his tent toward Sodom: he pitched his heart

toward the world.

His progression into his downfall was contained in his heart attitude. This is similar to Psalm 1:

Ps 1:1-2 Blessed *is* the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

2But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

The man who is not blessed first *walks* among the ungodly. He then stops walking and pauses *to stand* with the sinners. In the end, the ungodly man *sits down* and makes himself comfortable in the seat of the downright scornful. By pitching his tent toward Sodom, Lot was setting his heart and preparing himself to walk among the ungodly, hang out with sinners, and get cozy with the scornful. When deciding to follow God, don't worry about whether you are getting the best for yourself. Trust God that you are getting the best: time with God. No matter where you are or what your circumstances, having a relationship God is the most important thing. Abram didn't have the lush valley and the night life. What he *did* have out on the mountains and the highlands was the mountain top experience with God.

Sometimes people worry about putting themselves in the hands of God when they are called upon to trust Jesus as their Savior. You don't have to wonder if Jesus will come through for you with salvation; He already did it. You don't have to worry about losing your friends; trust God to be your friend. You don't have to worry about whether you will get what you want; what God will work in your life is good for eternity.

1. Abram's rationale - Gen 12:10, Prov 3:5-7, Gen 12:11-16
2. God's grace - Gen 12:17-20, Heb 12:5-13
3. Abram's trust - Gen 13:1-18 Ps 1:1-2