

Oct 10th 2010: New Series:-'The Reason I am Still a Believer'
Abraham: Life in a Back Pack!

Already this morning some of you have shared with us the reason why you are still a believer and that has been most helpful. But just as helpful as the reasons we give are the reasons that someone like Abraham might give if he was to appear before us.

Abraham is known as the Father of the Jewish race. His story fills 13 of the 50 chapters that make up the book of Genesis. Again and again he is mentioned in both the Old and the New Testaments and he is given more verses in Hebrews chapter 11—the heroes of Faith chapter—than any other person. He was a man who remained solid in his faith throughout his long life despite the many trials and tests he endured.

I've described life for Abraham as 'Life in a Back Pack' , because it seems from the moment he responded to God's call in Genesis he was destined to a life of unpredictability. Hebrews 11:8 tells us:

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.

It goes on to mention that he lived in a tent—going from place to place, and it seems that constantly throughout his life he had to make decision after decision that rested on belief in God's promises. Sometimes he made the right decision, and sometimes he made the wrong one. His was a challenging existence. A nomadic existence that caused him, Hebrews 11:10 informs us, to be ever looking forward to a city with foundations whose architect and builder is God.

For Abraham there were many pivotal moments in his life. Occasions when he had a decision to make that would send his whole future down one track or another. But none was so heavy to bear as the decision thrust upon him by Almighty God concerning the sacrifice of his son Isaac.

Such a demand on the part of God stood in complete contrast to all that Abraham had known about God up to that point in time. This God had called Abraham friend. He had miraculously provided Abraham and Sarah with this son when they were both way past the age of having children, and had made promises about the future of Abraham's line based on Isaac. Even if you detract all the emotional and ethical elements from the picture, the simple truth was that Isaac needed to produce children to make those grand promises happen. To sacrifice him as a teenager before he could procreate was a counter-productive move, to say the least.

So imagine for a moment that you have the chance to talk to Abraham as he is chewing over the implication of God's command. As he tells you the whole story and what God is asking for, you begin to have some interesting thoughts in your head about this Yaweh God that Abraham worships. About this God's consistency. His aim and purpose in all this. And perhaps you begin to think that it might be time for Abraham to move on as

far as following this God is concerned. That maybe Abraham should simply thank God for all His help in the past but basically say that he is taking his business elsewhere. That there are other gods available and he is going to decommission Yaweh and pick another god that is more suitable for where he is in life at present. *No hard feelings God; we can still remain friends if you want; but you know how it is—times and people change and you are just not what I need anymore.* That's what you think, but it's not what you say to this old and obviously, godly man standing before you.

Instead you turn to him and say, Abraham, why are you still a believer in, and a follower of, this God Yaweh?

And from my knowledge of Abraham as presented in Scripture, I believe he would have given at least the following reasons:-

First: Because I trusted Him at the beginning and I still trust Him now. From the moment God called Abraham to:-

Gen 12:1 "***Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.***" Abraham had lived a life of trusting in God. He was not always on the ball with his trust. Several times he failed miserably and other times he did great. Just like us in fact. But he always set out to trust the God that had chosen him, for he knew that such a God was absolutely trustworthy.

Now of course the other word for trust is faith. Believing in God to the extent that you rest your whole life and future in His hands through the good and through the bad. Abraham would have explained to us that you don't stop trusting in God because where He leads you, or what He asks of you is hard. You trust Him because He has proved Himself worthy of trust before and will do so again. You trust Him even when things continue to get worst because He is the one that you trust.

If life was so easy and painless all the time with no challenges you would not need to have faith or the One who makes faith possible.

A writer called Jimmy Evans said: "***God put giants in the Promised Land to keep unbelievers out.***". You could also say that God put the giants there to keep the believer's trusting in Him.

Sir Wilfred Grenfell, medical missionary in Labrador, found himself adrift on an ice flow, headed out to sea. He mercifully killed his dogs, made a coat out of their hides, put up a distress flag, and lay down and slept. Later he said, "There was nothing to fear. I had done all I could, the rest lay in God's hands."

George Muller stated that:-Faith does not operate in the realm of the possible. There is no glory for God in that which is humanly possible. Faith begins where man's power ends.

Second: Because He promises me more than anyone else does.

What God promised Abraham can be summarized in the first three verses of Genesis 12. In verse 1 God says: I will show you

¹ *The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.*

The promise of guidance with a purpose. Almighty God promised that His hand would be on Abraham's life. That He would guide him, and through that guidance would give him and his descendants the promised land.

In verse 2 God says: I will make you

² *"I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you;*

God promised Abraham that He would make him into a great nation. That his descendants would be as the sand on the sea shore—without number.

Also in this verse God says: I will bless you.

By this time Abraham had already known so much of God's blessing, but He recognized that there was more still to come. That God's blessing would not only overflow to him and his family but through his seed, and as the Apostle Paul says in Romans—this is a reference to Jesus. Through his seed all the families and nations of the world would be blessed.

There was no other god or person that could have promised Abraham anything like that and Abraham knew from previous experience, that his God delivered.

As Christians we can look at each of those three things and recognize how God the father promises those to us and much more. We have the promised Holy Spirit within us to guide us and keep us. God has made us into a mighty kingdom in which we serve Him not as slaves, but as His children. In Christ we have an inheritance set aside for us in glory. A treasure that cannot fade or perish. We have this guarantee of total forgiveness and immunity from judgement because we have been born again as new creations in Christ Jesus. God blesses us daily and uses us to bless others.

Think of any promises that your non-Christian friends hold on to so tightly. Maybe the promise of great earthly wealth, security, celebrity, freedom to do as they please. Not one or all of those promises comes near to even equaling, let alone surpassing the promises we have in Jesus.

Surely we can echo the words of Paul in Philippians 3:7-8

⁷But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.

Then Third: Abraham would say I am still a believer because my God gives me second chances. He allows me to fail and then restores me.

Twice Abraham made the same big mistake. He went into Egypt seeking help from a non-believing Pharaoh and, because he was fearful for his own life, passed off his wife as his sister. We read about that in Genesis 12. Then again in Genesis 20 we read about Abraham doing exactly the same thing some years later, but this time it was in Gerar. It was a lie that he lived out because his trust in God was not as strong at that point as was needed. The consequences of such mistakes were widespread and hurt a lot of people.

Yet God forgave him. He took him out of dangerous situations and protected him. He was gracious to him and restored him.

God is still like that to us who follow Him. He knows how frail we are and is more ready to forgive us than we are to forgive others, and even to forgive ourselves.

The Gospel of Mark we believe to be mainly based on the recollections of the Apostle Peter, and it is this fact that makes two little words that are included in the angels' instructions to the women after they had seen the empty tomb, so meaningful. For Mark 16:6 tells us that the angel said to them:-

"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.' "

Peter who had denied Jesus so strongly with oaths and curses. Peter who had felt so crushed and defeated afterwards, and who had wept with shame and anguish. Peter who would have found it so hard to forgive himself, knew he was forgiven by Jesus—knew he was being given yet another chance—when those ladies returned with the simple message→**and Peter.**

Have you ever sensed God giving you a second chance. Placing His loving hand upon you and saying, I forgive you because I love you, and I want you to know that you are still my child and a worker in my vineyard.

The late German theologian and preacher, Helmut Thielicke (1908-1986), had an old photograph which he always kept near his desk. It was a snapshot of a nativity pageant. A group of rather grizzled looking men are wearing white robes and holding candles in their rough hands. Another group of men is kneeling before them, feigning terror. It is clear that the robed men are supposed to be the angels, speaking to the crouched and fearful shepherds.

Why this photograph in the pastor's study? Thielicke explained that it was taken in prison. The men in the scene were all convicts, hardened criminals whose lives had been transformed by Christ. These murderers and thugs were dressed like angels. For

Thielicke, it was a beautiful parable, a visible remind of the power of the God of second chances to overcome human sin.

James Newton, [Uncommon Friends: Life with Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, Harvey Firestone, Alexis Carrel and Charles Lindbergh, 1989, p.22.](#)

Thomas A. Edison was working on a crazy contraption called a "light bulb" and it took a whole team of men 24 straight hours to put just one together. The story goes that when Edison was finished with one light bulb, he gave it to a young boy helper, who nervously carried it up the stairs. Step by step he cautiously watched his hands, obviously frightened of dropping such a priceless piece of work. You've probably guessed what happened by now; the poor young fellow dropped the bulb at the top of the stairs. It took the entire team of men twenty-four more hours to make another bulb. Finally, tired and ready for a break, Edison was ready to have his bulb carried up the stairs. He gave it to the same young boy who dropped the first one. That's true forgiveness.

I sure that we can all look at Abraham and appreciate the reasons he may have given for why he was still a believer, and maybe they are our reasons too. But perhaps the one that shows how vital it is to know God as Father is because He is the God who loves to forgive. To reinstate.

This morning you may need to hear that anew. To come again to a God who loves to restore and recycle His people. To thank Him for the way He has given you in the past so many second chances, and to confess that this is something we need to do more for others. And perhaps for you, to come and accept from Him the forgiveness and renewal he offers, for there is no one else who can give the lasting forgiveness that He gives with such abundance.

