

Emblems From Abraham's Tent

by A.B. Simpson

The sermon emphasizes the importance of living a life of faith, consecration, and surrender to God, as exemplified by the life of Abraham.

Scripture: Hebrews 11:8

Topics: "Consecration", "Faith"

Description

A.B. Simpson explores the life of Abraham as a model for Christian pilgrimage, emphasizing the importance of living as strangers on earth while seeking a heavenly home. He highlights Abraham's tent as a symbol of the pilgrim life, his altar as a representation of consecration and faith, and his seed as a testament to the faith life that extends beyond oneself. The sermon also discusses the significance of Abraham's covenant with God, sealed through circumcision, and the trials of faith that accompany God's promises. Ultimately, Simpson calls believers to embrace the fullness of their faith in Christ, the true object of their hope, and to live lives marked by trust, sacrifice, and a commitment to God's promises.

Transcript

SECTION I -- Abraham's Tent, or the Pilgrims Life

The first symbol we find in the patriarch's life is his moving tent. He has left the wealth and earthly prospects of his native home and committed himself to the vicissitudes of a pilgrim life. While an heir of the world, he is himself to have no certain dwelling place, but wander as a stranger on earth "looking for a better country, and a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

The first lesson of Abraham's tent is that of Christian pilgrimage. Like him, the children of faith must also be separated from the world and live as strangers and pilgrims upon earth, confessing that, here, we have no continuing city, but seek one to come. How little this is realized in the selfishness of modern Christianity and the worldliness of the professed followers of Christ is very sad to contemplate. It is not necessary in order to have a spiritual state that we get out of the world or be isolated from its practical affairs. The real essence of worldliness is in the spirit rather than in the circumstances; in the love rather than the possession of earthly things. One may possess millions with a truly consecrated spirit and be a real miser over a few worthless treasures. The spirit of consecration requires that the heart shall be detached from worldly aims and motives, and that we should hold the world as not possessing, and use it as not abusing it. "For the fashion of the world passeth away." We should never have our hearts or our interests so invested in the things of life as not to be able, like Abraham, to emigrate at Gods call to some altered

circumstances, or even to fold our tent altogether and enter upon our eternal existence. Let us pause and ask ourselves, where is my life invested? Where is my heart directed? Am I living in a tent, or building for myself a palace of earthly ambition or indulgence which

the hand of death will soon crumble into a narrow tomb.

But again, Abraham's tent not only tells us of the pilgrim life, but also of the true hopes and eternal promises for which faith must wait, and possess now only as he possessed the land, as a homeless wanderer. It was all his own, and yet shall be his literal inheritance; but during his earthly life he found in it no permanent resting place. So faith must still accept its heritage and learn, not only to hope, but also quietly wait for the salvation of God.

SECTION II -- Abraham's Altar, or the Consecrated Life.

Wherever the patriarch rested his tent, there he also erected an altar to his God. This was the expression, in the first place, of his steadfast faith in the plan of mercy which God had revealed at the gate of Eden, and through the sacrifices of His own appointment. This altar represented to his piety all that for us is involved in the Cross of Calvary and the blood of Jesus. This was ever the spring of his consecration and the support of his future hopes. He saw afar off the coming Redeemer, and trusted in His grace even in the dim light of the Gospel as it was revealed to him in these simple emblems.

More clearly afterwards this mystery of the Savior's death and resurrection was unfolded in the offering of his own Isaac on the mount, and the substitution of the victim provided by Jehovah in his place. For us also, the cross of Jesus and the simple faith which rests in His atoning blood must ever be the source and support of every grace. But Abraham's altar was not only expressive of the Savior's blood, but his own consecration. The burnt offering which he was accustomed to lay upon that altar was the especial expression of the entire devotion of his whole being to God, of which his obedient life was the constant pledge and evidence, and the sacrifice even of his dearest affections and divinest promises and hopes was the last and crowning proof.

Not only did he leave his sins at the foot of that altar and lay himself upon it a living sacrifice, but even the very son that God had given, and the promises which were linked inseparably with him were also laid there in unreserved surrender and committal. This is the last and sublimest height of Christian life, not only to give to God the thing which we have called our own, but to give back and hold as his the things that he has given, and the most precious and sacred hopes and trusts of our life.

It was this which God so prized in the spirit of his servant and for which He so blessed and honored him. Such trust and such consecration need never fear that they can lose aught by this absolute surrender. Indeed, our blessings are never fully blest until like Isaac they are given back as from the dead, and henceforth held not as our own, but as God's deposit in our keeping. Have we come to Abraham's altar? Have we left our sins beneath its flowing blood, and accepted the atonement of its great sacrifice, and then have we laid ourselves upon it in identification with that divine sacrifice, a whole burnt offering unto God?

Yes, have we even placed there our Isaacs of affection -- nay, even of divine promise and spiritual hope and expectation, and are we holding all, even our most sacred hopes and interests, as divine trusts committed to us for His service and glory? Thus alone shall we know the secret of Abraham's faith, as we enter into the fullness of his consecration. In speaking of the intimacy with which he treats him, God gives

this significant record, "for I know him." While Abraham fully trusted God, God also felt that he could fully trust Abraham.

Dear friend, can God depend on you and your absolute singleness and fidelity to Him? Blessed be the glorious grace, we may take Him for this perfect heart.

SECTION III -- Abraham's Seed, or the Faith Life.

It was in regard to the promise of his seed that the patriarch's faith was chiefly exercised and tested. As first received and understood by him, the promise referred to his literal offspring, but as the covenant became more explicit and the light more clear, it extended into vaster meaning, and the promised seed became to him the symbol of his coming Savior. That this was so is plain from the Apostle's language in Gal. 3: 16, "He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ." That Abraham so understood it, is implied in the words of Christ to the Pharisees, "your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad." John 8: 56. So that Abraham's faith and promises were all summed up and centered in the personal Christ. So let our faith find its center, and our promises always reach their true focus in Him who is the first and the last, and the All in All of Christian faith and hope. Let even our dearest earthly affections and expectations, like Abraham's beloved son, be linked with and lost in the person of Jesus himself. Then, indeed, will all our life be heavenly, and all our heart strings bind us to His heart of love.

But there is another most important thought suggested by Abraham's seed, namely: that his faith and hope were lifted beyond himself and the narrow limits of his own short life, to find their fruition in the lives of others and reach their fullness not so much in the blessing which he was to receive, as to the blessing he was to become. The linking of all his promises with his seed was a constant challenge to the spirit of disinterestedness and teaches us that we, too, are to lose our lives in the lives of others, and find our blessing in being a blessing. Natural science teaches that the great design of every plant in nature is expressed in the seed, and realized in the principle of reproduction. While we may value the fruit tree chiefly for its rich and luscious fruit, nature recognizes the little seed imbedded in the juicy pulp as the true value and essential fruit of the plant; and so God estimates us, not so much for what we are, as for what we may become in the issues of our lives. The tree is therefore known by its fruit, and the test and standard of the fruit laid down by Christ is, "Some thirty, some sixty, and some a hundred fold."

The promise was given to him in the form of two most striking symbols; the first of these was the sand upon the seashore which his offspring was to outnumber. This, no doubt, had special reference to his earthly posterity, the literal seed of Abraham which will doubtless completely realize in the coming ages of Israel's restoration, even the expressive fullness of this promise. The second was the stars of heaven, whose number and splendor modern science has expanded far beyond Abraham's highest conception; but even this shall be more than fulfilled in the spiritual seed of the Father of the faithful. A great multitude that no man can number, as various in their spiritual character, and infinitely more glorious than the stars of heaven shall yet gather at his feet, and prove to him and the universe the faithfulness of God, and the blessedness of trusting Him. The same splendid figure is used in describing the rewards and prospects of Christian service, "They that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever." We also may therefore claim the same glorious promises and possibilities. This is the true aim and the most satisfying recompense of human life. When the applause or criticisms of man shall be forgotten, when the transient discomforts or enjoyments of life shall be past, when the fire shall have tried every man's work, and the wood and stubble shall have drifted away in the ashes of the last conflagration; oh, then it will be

blessed indeed to gather out of the wreck of life the treasures of precious souls we have been permitted to save, and place them in His crown and our own. God grant that we may have such constellations in yonder firmament.

"There needs not for such the love-written story,

The name and the monument graven in stone;

The things we have lived for, let these be our glory,

And we be remembered by what we have done."

SECTION IV -- Abraham's Seal, or the Resurrection Life.

God's covenant with Abraham was ratified by a special sign which is called the seal -- that is, a divine token intended to mark the importance and certainty of the transaction, and the stability of the promises involved. This seal was the rite of circumcision which from this time became the distinctive mark of the Old Testament covenant, and the initiatory rite of Judaism. It was not a mere arbitrary sign, but was fitted to express in its own nature the most important truths. It was especially significant of that great principle which underlies the whole economy of grace, namely: the death of the old and the resurrection of the new life. Circumcision was the death of the flesh and was designed to express the great fact that our carnal nature and our very life itself, in its inmost center and springs, must be crucified and then divinely renewed and purified. This is the same truth taught us in the New Testament ordinance of Christian Baptism, only the latter gives more emphasis to the life as the former does to the death side of the figure, as might naturally be expected from the place of these ordinances in the two dispensations. Thus early and thus vividly did God begin to teach His people that the new life must be a creation and must spring out of the grave; and that man's fallen nature cannot be improved by culture or gradually raised to purity and heaven, but that the sentence pronounced at the deluge must be literally fulfilled: "The end of all flesh has come before me."

Hence this figure of circumcision runs through the entire old Testament as the picture of sanctification. "Circumcise your hearts," "uncircumcised in heart," etc. Have we learned this searching and humbling, yet blessed truth? And blessed it is that we may die to this sad and sinful self, and live with Him who died for us and rose again. Have we entered into the power of His resurrection and been made conformable unto His death, and are we reckoning ourselves to be dead, indeed, unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ? Failure here has been the secret of almost all our failures. Thoroughness and faithfulness here will save us a thousand deaths in the Christian life and make our life a joy and power.

The day prescribed for the rite of circumcision was as expressive as the rite itself. The eighth day is the beginning of a new week, and thus expresses most fully the idea of the new creation and the resurrection-life. God grant that we may all know the full meaning of this ancient seal and pass out of the seven days of nature's life into the eighth day of life's new and eternal week of resurrection power and blessing.

If Christ would live and reign in me,

I must die, I must die.

Like Him I crucified must be;

I must die, I must die.

Lord, drive the nails, nor heed the groans,

My flesh may writhe and make its moans,

But in this way, and this alone,

I must die, I must die.

When I am dead, then, Lord, to thee

I shall live, I shall live;

My time, my strength, my all to thee,

Will I give, will I give.

Oh, may the Son now make me free!

Here, Lord, I give my all to thee,

For time and for eternity,

I will live, I will live.

SECTION V -- Abraham's Name; or, the Confession of Faith.

The covenant must not only be sealed, but claimed. Abraham's faith must not only be confirmed by God's seal, but also must "set to His seal that God is true." When God commits Himself to His promise, He expects us to do the same as unreservedly, and so Abraham was soon required to prove his trust by open and unequivocal confession. The opportunity was afforded in a very striking and significant manner. God required him to assume a new name, slightly modified in form from his old name, but signally different in meaning.

The name Abram meant the mighty father, but God gave him the name Abraham which signifies the father of a multitude. The first he could claim without involving any question of propriety, but the assuming of the other involved the confession of his future hopes and expectations. And when we remember that this was done at a time in his life when his age precluded the natural probability or even possibility of the thing he claimed, we begin to see how very real the test must have been.

He was an old man, and his body was now dead. The hope of natural issue was contrary to common sense, and yet the adoption of the new name would necessarily be known to all his acquaintances, and would require an explanation and proclamation of his unreasonable hopes. For one possessing his dignity and influence with his family and followers, this must have been naturally very trying, and the trial was rendered still harder when it was protracted through a long season of apparently fruitless waiting.

But the faith of Abraham shrank not from the full ordeal. Not only did he profess his confidence in his Father's fulfillment of the promise, but he proceeded to act upon it as if it were already past, and thus became the witness of that highest of all degrees of faith -- that principle which is, perhaps, essential to all true faith, of which the apostle says that it "calleth those things that are not as though they were." This,

indeed, is the faith attributed to God Himself by the apostle in Romans 4: 17; and on this principle He is constantly acting in treating future events as if already real.

Thus his own dear Son was regarded as slain from the foundation of the world. Thus we are recognized even in our earthly life as seated with Christ in heavenly places and invested already with the dignities and glories of our future inheritance. This is the faith which God requires from his people and which he is willing to give them; and indeed nothing but the Spirit of Christ Himself within us can enable us thus to believe and testify. Again let us ask ourselves, what are we witnessing to in our lives?

How far have we really risked our all upon God's promises? How much have we ventured upon His simple word and counted the things that are not as living realities, not only in our hearts, but by the entire witness of our lives? Have we thus accepted His pardon and confessed it? Have we thus received His sanctifying grace and claimed our inheritance in Christ's fullness? Have we thus taken Him for our physical and temporal needs and ventured forth, without waiting for evidence, upon His simple and naked word?

It is the record of God's ancient saints that they were witnesses of faith. In the eleventh chapter of Hebrews they shine like stars -- like constellations in the firmament -- of the Old Testament. Shall our names thus shine in the annals of this dispensation? We are writing the record every day; God help to inscribe them as with the point of a diamond in the Rock forever; and let the record ever be "I believe God," and "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day."

SECTION VI -- Abraham's Vision, or the Trial of Faith.

Sooner or later the test of suffering must follow every promise and confession. To Abraham it comes in a significant symbol recorded in the fifteenth chapter of Genesis, the vision of a smoking furnace and a burning lamp that passed between the portions of his sacrifice, in the darkness of the evening, and the deeper gloom that had gathered about his spirit. So for us the promises of God may be followed by the going down of earth's sun in deep trials and even the horror of great darkness which sometime comes upon the inner sky; and then amid the darkness comes the fiery furnace of heart searching anguish and suffering. The children of faith must be tested in the very fire, and the more victorious the faith, and the more glorious the witness, the hotter must ever be the flame, until it seems as though both life and faith must be consumed. But gold is indestructible, and faith survives and brightens with its trial. There is another figure in the vision, and that is the burning lamp that shines amid the darkness and above the smoke of the furnace. This is the heavenly presence which never forsakes us in the darkest hour. Majestic symbol of that yet grander figure which in later days came to Israel as they came forth from Egypt's iron furnace, the pillar of cloud and fire -- the type of the light and protection which the Holy Spirit brings to the tried and trusting heart as it passes through the wilderness. It was in this hour of darkness and vision of fire that God gave to Abraham the most definite promise of his future inheritance, writing in the vivid light of the furnace flames the very names of the nations that he should dispossess through his seed, and speaking of it all in the perfect tense as already accomplished. Is it not even so with us that it is in the hour of keen suffering that God has ever spoken to us His greatest words, and burned into our vision with a definiteness and vividness which faith can never forget, the promises that He is now fulfilling in our grateful lives. Let us not fear the darkness and the fire, but trust the more through that which comes chiefly to try our trust. Suffering is not always meant to burn out the dross, but often to burn in the promise. Let us not think it strange concerning the fiery trial that is to try us; it is more precious, even to Him who sends it, than gold which perisheth, and will "be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

SECTION VII -- Melchizedek; or, the True Object of our Faith.

A mysterious human figure crosses the path of Abraham for one brief hour, and leaves an impression so vivid that it has remained as a prophetic vision of the coming Messiah, both in the Psalms and in the new Testament. This figure is regarded by many authorities as really superhuman, and indeed no less than the actual and personal Christ Himself living on the earth before His advent in human form, in order for a little to represent to Abraham what his earthly life afterwards represented to the world, His mediatorial character and work.

We cannot accept this view without stronger evidence than the Scriptures offer. It would seem uncalled for that Christ should twice appear on earth in actual personality. We believe that he did appear to Abraham in human form just prior to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, but this was doubtless an assumed appearance. Melchizedek is represented as an actual human personage. He was the King of Salem, the ancient Jerusalem; he was also a true worshiper and official priest of the most high God; probably like Job, one that had preserved the primitive faith handed down from Noah without corruption, and that God used him as a special type of the official character and mediatorial work of the coming Messiah.

The Apostle declares that he was without father, without mother, without descent. He must mean by this that his record is thus mysterious and unknown; that he stands across the course of time without introduction, a vivid and transient figure expressing in one brief glance the aspects which God would reveal to us concerning His Son. These are expressed by the name, position and office of Melchizedek. His name in Hebrew signifies King of Righteousness; his political position was that of King of Salem, which signified peace, and his official character was that of a priest.

He thus combined in his own person the two offices of priest and king, and the two qualities of righteousness and peace. These are the four thoughts which constituted Christ's mediatorial office and work. He is our priest and king, and he brings us His righteousness and peace. As our priest He settles for us the question of sin, and secures our spiritual standing and privileges with God; as our king he protects us, subdues us, governs us and guides us, and conquers our enemies and His.

As our true Melchizedek he combines these two offices in one person so that the king, whose majesty we might dread, is the priest whose suffering and intercession have saved us from our sins and reconciled us to His favor. He brings to us his justifying and sanctifying righteousness, and becomes to us the Lord, our righteousness. And he will bless his people with peace. His sprinkled blood pacifies the guilty conscience. His pardoning love brings us into peace with God. His gentle Spirit breathes upon our hearts his rest.

His bosom offers us repose for every care and fear, and in the inner chamber of his presence we find the peace that passeth all understanding. All this he represented to Abraham. All this Christ is to us. Have we met and accepted Him like the ancient patriarch? Have we yielded to Him our worship and submission? Has he become our great High Priest, our supreme and glorious King? Has he covered us with his righteousness, and become to us our sanctification? And have we at the footstool of His throne received Him as the Prince of Peace, and found it true in our happy experience "of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end"?

Such are some of the symbols of Abraham's life. As we leave them, shall they leave us also on our pilgrimage for the better country which he has reached, and on the altar of sacrifice where he found all by giving all? Shall they have brought us the vision of our seed, and sealed us with the secret of our true life, the death of self, and the resurrection life of Christ? And shall we go forth from them confessors, like him,

of our covenant promises, even if it be in the fiery furnace and the midnight gloom of life's deepest trials? And, above all other lessons, greater than Abraham or Abraham's faith, have they brought us to the feet of the Prince of Peace and the King of Righteousness, as the Author and Finisher of our faith, and the Alpha and Omega of all our hopes and blessings?

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