

Gathered to His People

by F.B. Meyer

The sermon explores the secret of Abraham's widespread renown and the fruits of his faith, which include virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity.

Scripture: Genesis 25:8, Psalm 131:2, Hebrews 6:16

Topics: "Eternal Life", "Faith"

Description

F.B. Meyer reflects on the life and legacy of Abraham, emphasizing his profound faith and the virtues that stemmed from it, such as courage, knowledge, self-control, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. Abraham's unwavering trust in God allowed him to navigate life's challenges and ultimately led to his revered status across cultures and generations. Meyer highlights that Abraham's death was not a tragic end but a joyful reunion with his people, illustrating the hope of eternal fellowship for believers. The sermon encourages listeners to cultivate a faith like Abraham's, which is rooted in a deep relationship with God and manifests in a life of virtue and love. Ultimately, Meyer calls for a complete surrender to God, trusting Him to produce a fruitful life.

Transcript

"These are the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived; an hundred, threescore, and fifteen years. Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people." -- Genesis 25:8.

No human name can vie with Abraham's for the wide-spread reverence which it has evoked amongst all races and throughout all time. The pious Jew looked forward to reposing, after death, in the bosom of Father Abraham. The fact of descent from him was counted by thousands sufficient to secure them a passport into heaven. Apostles so opposite as Paul and James united in commending his example to the imitation of primitive Christians, in an age which had seen the Lord Jesus Himself. The medieval Church canonized Abraham alone among Old Testament worthies, by no decree, but by popular consent. Devout Moslems reverence his name as second only to that of their prophet. What was the secret of this widespread renown? It is not because he headed one of the greatest movements of the human family; nor yet because he evinced manly and intellectual vigor; nor because he possessed vast wealth. It was rather the remarkable nobility and grandeur of his religious life that has made him the object of veneration to all generations of mankind.

AT THE BASIS OF HIS CHARACTER WAS A MIGHTY FAITH

"Abraham believed God." In that faith he left his native land, and travelled to one which was promised, but not clearly indicated. In that faith he felt able to let Lot choose the best he could for himself; because he was sure that none could do better for himself than God was prepared to do for the one who trusted Him. In that faith he waited through long years, sure that God would give him the promised child. In that faith he lived a nomad life, dwelling in tents, and making no attempt to return to the settled country from which he had come out. Indeed, his soul was consumed with the passionate expectancy of the city of God. In that faith he was prepared to offer Isaac, and buried Sarah.

Do not suppose that his faith dwelt alone. On the contrary, it bore much fruit; for if we test him by those catalogues of the fruits of faith which are provided in the New Testament, we shall find that he manifested them each and all. Take, for instance, that chain of linked graces enumerated in the Second Epistle by the Apostle Peter; a kind of golden ladder, stretched across the chasm between heaven and earth, and uniting them.

TO FAITH HE ADDED VIRTUE, OR MANLY COURAGE

What could have been more manly than the speed with which he armed his trained servants; or than the heroism with which he, with a train of undisciplined shepherds, broke on the disciplined bands of Assyria, driving them before him as the chaff before the whirlwind, and returning victorious down the long valley of the Jordan?

AND TO MANLY COURAGE HE ADDED KNOWLEDGE

All his life he was a student in God's college of divinity. Year by year fresh revelations of the character and attributes of God broke upon his soul. He grew in the knowledge of God and the Divine nature, which at the first had been to him a *TERRA INCOGNITA*. An unknown country grew beneath his gaze: as he climbed through the years into closer fellowship with God, and from the summit looked down upon its lengths and breadths, its depths and heights, its oceans, mountain-ranges, and plains.

AND TO KNOWLEDGE HE ADDED TEMPERANCE, OR SELF-CONTROL

That he was master of himself is evident from the way in which he repelled the offer of the King of Sodom; and curbed his spirit amid the irritations caused by Lot's herdsmen. The strongest spirits are those which have the strongest hand upon themselves, and are able, therefore, to do things which weaker men would fail in. There is no type of character more splendid than that of the man who is master of himself, because he is the servant of God; and who can rule others rightly because he can rule himself well.

AND TO TEMPERANCE, PATIENCE

Speaking of him, the voice of New Testament inspiration affirms that he "patiently endured" (Hebrews 6:16). No ordinary patience was that which waited through the long years, not murmuring or complaining, but prepared to abide God's time; weaned from the breasts of earthly consolation and help, and quieted after the manner of the Psalmist, who said, "I have quieted myself as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child. Let Israel hope in the Lord from henceforth and for ever." (Psalms 131:2-3).

AND TO HIS PATIENCE HE ADDED GODLINESS

One of his chief characteristics was his piety -- a constant sense of the presence of God in his life, and a love and devotion to Him. Wherever he pitched his tent, there his first care was to rear an altar. Shechem, Hebron, Beersheba -- alike saw these tokens of his reverence and love. In every time of trouble he turned as naturally to God as a child to its father; and there was such holy intercourse between his spirit and that of God, that the name by which he is now best known throughout the East is "THE FRIEND" -- a name which he holds PAR EXCELLENCE, and which has almost overshadowed the use of that name by which we know him best.

AND TO GODLINESS HE ADDED BROTHERLY KINDNESS

Some men who are devoted towards God are lacking in the tenderer qualities towards those most closely knit with them in family bonds. Not so was it with Abraham. He was full of affection. Beneath the calm exterior and the erect bearing of the mighty chieftain there beat a warm and affectionate heart. Listen to that passionate cry, "Oh that Ishmael might live before Thee!" Remember God's own testimony to the affection he bore towards Isaac -- "Thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest." Abraham's nature therefore may be compared to those ranges of mighty hills, whose summits rear themselves above the region of storms, and hold converse with the skies; whilst their lower slopes are clothed with woods and meadows, where homesteads nestle and bright children string their necklaces of flowers with merry laughter.

AND TO BROTHERLY KINDNESS HE ADDED CHARITY, OR LOVE

In his dealings with men he could afford to be generous, open-hearted, open-handed; willing to pay down the large price demanded for Machpelah's cave without haggling or complaint; destitute of petty pride; affable, courteous, able to break out into sunny laughter; right with God, and therefore able to shed upon men the rays of a genial, restful noble heart.

ALL THESE THINGS WERE IN HIM AND ABOUNDED, and they made him neither barren nor unfruitful; they made his calling and election sure; they prepared for him an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of God our Savior. The thought that underlies the expression in the Greek (ΠΛΟΥΣΙΩΣ Η ΕΙΣΟΔΟΣ) is richly significant. The words denote the welcome given by choral songs and joyous greetings to the conqueror who, laden with spoils, returned to his native city; and they indicate that for some favored souls, at least, there is waiting on the threshold of the other world a welcome so exuberant, so boisterous in its unutterable joy, so royally demonstrative, as to resemble that given in all times to those who have conferred great benefits, or who have learnt the art of stirring the loyal devotion of their fellows. If such an entrance could be accorded to any one, certainly it would be to Abraham, when, stooping beneath the weight of one hundred threescore and fifteen years, "he gave up the ghost, and died at a good old age, an old man, full of years, and was gathered to his people."

"ABRAHAM GAVE UP THE GHOST."

There was no reluctance in his death; he did not cling to life -- he was glad to be gone; and when the angel-messenger summoned him, without a struggle, nay, with the readiness of glad consent, his spirit returned to God who gave it.

HE WAS GATHERED TO HIS PEOPLE

This cannot refer to his body; for that did not sleep beside his ancestors, but side by side with Sarah's. Surely then it must refer to his spirit. The world's grey fathers knew little of the future; but they felt that there was somewhere a mustering place of their clan, whither devout and holy souls were being gathered, one by one, so that each spirit, as it passed from this world, went to rejoin its people; the people from which it had sprung: the people whose name it bore; the people to which by its tastes and sympathies it was akin.

What a lovely synonym for death! To DIE is to rejoin our people; to pass into a world where the great clan is gathering, welcoming with shouts each new-comer through the shadows. Where are your people? I trust they are God's people; and if so, those that bear your name, standing on the other shore, are more numerous than the handful gathered around you here; many whom you have never known, but who know you; many whom you have loved and lost awhile; many who without you cannot be made perfect in their happiness. There they are, rank on rank, company on company, regiment on regiment, watching for your coming. Be sure you do not disappoint them! But remember, if your people are God's people, you cannot be gathered to them unless first in faith and love you are gathered to Him.

Little doubt had this noble man of the recognition of saintly spirits in the other world; and indeed, it is an untrue conception which has filled the future with strange spirits, unknowing and unknown. Heaven is not a prison with tier on tier of cells; but a HOME. And what is home without the recognition and love of fond hearts? So long as we read of David going to his child; of Paul anticipating the pleasure of meeting again his converts; of the women and disciples being able to recognize the appearance and the love of the Savior amid the glory of the resurrection body -- we may be prepared to believe, with the patriarch, that dying is re-union with those to whom in the deepest sense we are related. Spiritual affinities are for all time and for eternity, and will discover themselves through all worlds.

"AND HIS SONS, ISAAC AND ISHMAEL, BURIED HIM IN THE CAVE OF MACHPELAH."

There were great differences between these two. Ishmael, the child of his slave: Isaac, of the wedded wife. Ishmael, the offspring of expediency: Isaac, of promise. Ishmael, wild and masterful, "the wild ass"; strongly marked in his individuality; proud, independent, swift to take an insult, swift to avenge it: Isaac, quiet and retiring, submissive and meek, willing to carry wood, to be kept in the dark, to be bound, to yield up his wells, and to let his wife govern his house. And yet all differences were wiped out in that moment of supreme sorrow; and coming from his desert fastnesses, surrounded by his wild and ruffian freebooters, Ishmael united with the other son of their common father, who had displaced him in his inheritance, and who was so great a contrast to himself; but all differences were smoothed out in that hour.

Many ancient chieftains may have been gathered by that ancient cave, to join in one last act of respect to the mighty prince who had dwelt amongst them for so long. Amid the wail of the women, and the dirge which even to this day tells of sorrow for departed worth in Eastern lands -- borne by a band of his trusted retainers, whilst a vast concourse of the camp stood wrapped in reverent silence around -- the remains of the man who had dared to trust God at all costs, and who with pilgrim steps had traversed so many weary miles, were solemnly laid beside the dust of Sarah, his faithful wife. There, in all probability, they rest even to this day, and thence they will be raised at the coming of the King.

Out of materials which were by no means extraordinary, God built up a character with which He could hold fellowship as friend with friend; and a life which has exerted a profound influence on all after-time. It would seem as if He can raise any crop He chooses, when the soil of the heart and life are entirely surrendered

to Him. Why should not we henceforth yield ourselves utterly to His divine husbandry, asking Him to fulfil in us the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power? Only let us trust Him fully, and obey Him instantly and utterly; and as the years pass by, they shall witness results which shall bring glory to God in the highest, whilst they fill us with ceaseless praise.

ETEXT EDITOR'S NOTE

This digital edition is based on Christian Literature Crusade's uncopyrighted "Classic Portraits" reprint. It was manually retyped with minimal changes in punctuation and spelling, and a very light salting of clarifying word-changes: no more, I judge, than any publisher of a newly-typeset edition might have made. This is not a "modernized" edition, but the preservation of a great old book. As long as a print-media edition is available, I suggest that rather than "printing out" the etext, that you simply purchase a copy, and use this edition as an easily-sharable online resource.

F. B. Meyer was one of those who "found the secret", who dug the wells in the right places. I pray that many, like Isaac, will find again these fountains of blessing in the Spirit, which those who have gone before us have already discovered, and will also continue to dig new wells of refreshing wherever God illuminates his riches to needy hearts. Meyer's purpose was to lead many into the same kind of faith that "Father Abraham" lived by, and that even those of us who are believers "from the nations" may receive "the blessing of Abraham." Meyer's rich biography of ABRAHAM is worthy of thoughtful and prayerful study, of preservation, and of widespread sharing in any medium available.

In the process of retyping this classic work, I found Meyer - --or rather the Lord through His servant-- constantly speaking to my heart, encouraging and challenging me to trust in God's call and promises, and to be faithfully obedient to pursue the works God has laid before me. I trust and pray that this book in any medium or language will continue to bless and challenge God's people to grow in their "friendship" with the true and living Almighty God, until the glorified Messiah, the Lord Jesus, shall return for His own.

Since the reborn nation of Israel and the resurrected language of Hebrew have been a part of my world since childhood, I was particularly struck by Meyer's repeated insistence that God's promise to bring the Jews back to Palestine would indeed be fulfilled, even though eighteen centuries up to his time had not seen it. I studied "modern" Hebrew in college as a spoken living language, and I see news reports from Israel on television routinely. I am impressed that the prophecy which seemed humanly so unlikely to Meyer's generation, I see fulfilled as everyday mundane reality: but Meyer had cherished it with the vision of faith.

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May the blessing of Abraham be yours!

--Clyde C. Price, Jr. December 1995 Atlanta, Georgia, USA

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