

The Firmness of Abraham's Faith

by F.B. Meyer

The sermon explores the unwavering faith of Abraham, highlighting God's promises and the significance of belief in the face of trials and uncertainties.

Topics: "Faith", "Trust in God's Promises"

Description

F.B. Meyer emphasizes the unwavering faith of Abraham, who did not stagger at God's promises despite his fears and childlessness. He highlights how God reassured Abraham by declaring Himself as a shield and a great reward, encouraging him to trust in divine promises even when circumstances seemed impossible. Abraham's faith, counted as righteousness, serves as a model for believers, illustrating that true belief is rooted in the faithfulness of God. Meyer encourages the congregation to look beyond their doubts and to trust in God's timing and provision, as exemplified by Abraham's journey. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a deep, abiding faith that recognizes God as our ultimate reward.

Transcript

"He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God." -- Romans 4:20.

In this chapter (Genesis 15), for the first time in Scripture, four striking phrases occur; but each of them is destined to be frequently repeated with many charming variations. We may speak then of this precious paragraph as of some upland vale where streamlets take their rise which are to flow seawards, making glad the lowland pasture lands on their way. Now, first, we meet the phrase, "the word of the Lord came." Here, first, we are told that "the Lord God is a shield." For the first time rings out the silver chime of that Divine assurance, "Fear not!" And now we first meet in human history that great, that mighty word, "believed." What higher glory is there for man than that he should reckon on the faithfulness of God? For this is the meaning of all true belief.

The "word of the Lord" came to Abraham about two distinct matters.

(1) GOD SPOKE TO ABRAHAM ABOUT HIS FEAR

Abraham had just returned from the rout of Chedorlaomer and the confederate kings in the far north of Canaan; and there was a natural reaction from the long and unwonted strain as he settled down again into the placid and uneventful course of a shepherd's life. In this state of mind he was most susceptible to fear;

as the enfeebled constitution is most susceptible to disease.

And there was good reason for fear. He had defeated Chedorlaomer, it is true; but in doing so he had made him his bitter foe. The arm of the warrior-king had been long enough to reach to Sodom; why should it not be long enough and strong enough to avenge his defeat upon that one lonely man? It could not be believed that the mighty monarch would settle down content until the memory of his disastrous defeat was wiped out with blood. There was every reason, therefore, to expect him back again to inflict condign punishment. And, besides all this, as a night wind in a desert land, there swept now and again over the heart of Abraham a feeling of lonely desolation, of disappointment, of hope deferred. More than ten years had passed since he had entered Canaan. Three successive promises had kindled his hopes, but they seemed as far from realization as ever. Not one inch of territory! Not a sign of a child! Nothing of all that God had foretold!

It was under such circumstances that the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great Reward." Ah, our God does not always wait for us to come to Him; He often comes to us; He draws near to us in the low dungeon; He sends His angel to prepare for us the cruse of water and the baked cakes, and on our souls break His tender assurances of comfort, more penetrating than the roar of the surge, "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid."

But God does not content Himself with vague assurances. He gives us solid ground for comfort in some fresh revelation of Himself. And oftentimes the very circumstances of our need are chosen as a foil to set forth some special side of the Divine character which is peculiarly appropriate. What could have been more re-assuring at this moment to the defenseless pilgrim, with no stockade or walled city in which to shelter, but whose flocks were scattered far and wide, than to hear that God Himself was around him and his, as a vast, impenetrable, though invisible shield. "I am thy Shield."

Mankind, when once that thought was given, eagerly caught at it; and it has never been allowed to die. Again and again it rings out in prophecy and psalms, in temple anthem and from retired musings. "The Lord God is a sun and shield." "Thou art my hiding-place and my shield." "Behold, O God, our shield; and look upon the face of thine Anointed." "His truth shall be thy shield and buckler." It is a very helpful thought for some of us! We go every day into the midst of danger; men and devils strike at us; now it is the overt attack, and now the stab of the assassin; unkind insinuations, evil suggestions, taunts, gibes, threats; all these things are against us. But if we are doing God's will and trusting in God's care, ours is a charmed life, like that of the man who wears chain armor beneath his clothes. The Divine environment pours around us, rendering us impervious to attack, as the stream of electricity may surround a jewel-case with an atmosphere before which the stoutest attack of the most resolute felon is foiled. "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper" (Isaiah 54:17). "Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee." Happy are they who have learnt the art of abiding within the inviolable protection of the eternal God, on which all arrows are blunted, all swords turned aside, all sparks of malice extinguished with the hissing sound of a torch in the briny waters of the sea.

Nor does God only defend us from without, He is the REWARD and the satisfaction of the lonely heart. It was as if He asked Abraham to consider how much he had in having Himself. "Come now, my child, and think; even if thou wert never to have one foot of soil, and thy tent were to stand silent, amid the merry laughter of childish voices all around -- yet thou wouldest not have left thy land in vain, for thou hast Me.

Am not I enough? I fill heaven and earth; cannot I fill one lonely soul? Am not I 'thy exceeding great reward'; able to compensate thee by My friendship, to which thou art called, for any sacrifice that thou mayest have made?"

Our God, who is love, and love in its purest, divinest essence, has given us much, and promised us more; but still His best and greatest gift is His own dear self; our reward, our great reward, our exceeding great reward. Hast thou naught? Is thy life bare? Have lover and friend forsaken thee? Art thou lonely and forsaken of all the companions of earlier, younger days? Well, answer this one question more, Hast thou God? For if thou hast, thou hast all love and life, all sweetness and tenderness, all that can satisfy the heart, and delight the mind. All lovely things sleep in Him, as all colors hide in the sunbeam's ray, waiting to be unravelled. To have God is to have all, though bereft of everything. To be destitute of God is to be bereft of everything, though having all.

(2) GOD SPOKE TO ABRAHAM ABOUT HIS CHILDLESSNESS

It was night, or perhaps the night was turning towards the morning, but as yet myriads of stars -- the watchfires of the angels; the choristers of the spheres; the flocks on the wide pasture lands of space -- were sparking in the heavens. The patriarch was sleeping in his tent, when God came near him in a vision; and it was under the shadow of that vision that Abraham was able to tell God all that was in his heart. We can often say things in the dark which we dare not utter beneath the eye of day. And in that quiet watch of the night, Abraham poured out into the ear of God the bitter, bitter agony of his heart's life. He had probably long wanted to say something like this; but the opportunity had not come. But now there was no longer need for restraint; and so it all came right out into the ear of his Almighty Friend, "Behold, to me Thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir." It was as if he said, "I promised for myself something more than this; I have conned Thy promises, and felt that they surely prognosticated a child of my own flesh and blood; but the slowly moving years have brought me no fulfillment of my hopes; and I suppose that I mistook Thee. Thou never intendest more than that my steward should inherit my name and goods. Ah, me! it is a bitter disappointment; but Thou hast done it, and it is well."

So we often mistake God, and interpret His delays as denials. What a chapter might be written of God's delays! Was not the life of Jesus full of them, from the moment when He tarried behind in the Temple, to the moment when He abode two days still in the same place where He was, instead of hurrying across the Jordan in response to the sad and agonized entreaty of the sisters whom He loved. So He delays still. It is the mystery of the art of educating human spirits to the finest temper of which they are capable. What searchings of heart; what analyzing of motives; what testings of the Word of God; what upliftings of soul -- searching what, or what manner of time. the Spirit of God signifies! All these are associated with those weary days of waiting, which are, nevertheless, big with spiritual destiny. But such delays are not God's final answer to the soul that trusts Him. They are but the winter before the burst of spring. "And, behold, the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but thine own son shall be thine heir. Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them. So shall thy seed be" (Genesis 15:4-5). And from that moment the stars shone with new meaning for him, as the sacraments of Divine promise.

"AND HE BELIEVED IN THE LORD." What wonder that those words are so often quoted by inspired men in after ages; or that they lie as the foundation stone of some of the greatest arguments that have ever engaged the mind of man! (See Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:6; James 2:23.)

HE BELIEVED BEFORE HE UNDERWENT THE JEWISH RITE OF CIRCUMCISION

The Apostle Paul lays special emphasis on this, as showing that they who were not Jews might equally have faith, and be numbered amongst the spiritual children of the great father of the faithful (Romans 4:9-21; Galatians 3:7-29.) The promise that he should be the heir of the world was made to him, when as yet he was only the far-travelled pilgrim; and so it is sure to all the seed, not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.

HE BELIEVED IN FACE OF STRONG NATURAL IMPROBABILITIES

Appearances were dead against such a thing as the birth of a child to that aged pair. The experience of many years said, "It cannot be." The nature and reason of the case said, "It cannot be." Any council of human friends and advisers would have instantly said, "It cannot be!" And Abraham quietly considered and weighed them all "without being weakened in faith" (Romans 4:19 RV). Then he as carefully looked unto the promise of God. And, rising from his consideration of the comparative weight of the one and the other, he elected to venture everything on the word of the Eternal. Nay, that was not all; as shock followed shock, and wave succeeded wave, booming with crash of thunder on his soul, he staggered not; he did not budge an inch; he did not even tremble, as sometimes the wave-beat rock shivers to its base. He reckoned on the faithfulness of God. He gave glory to God. He relied implicitly on the utter trustworthiness of the Divine veracity. He was "fully assured that what He had promised He was able also to perform." Ah, child of God, for every look at the unlikelihood of the promise, take ten looks at the promise: this is the way in which faith waxes strong. "Looking unto the promise of God, he wavered not through unbelief, but waxed strong" (Romans 4:20 RV).

HIS FAITH WAS DESTINED TO BE SEVERELY TRIED

If you take to the lapidary the stones which you have collected in your summer ramble, he will probably send the bulk of them home to you in a few days, with scanty marks of having passed through his hands. But some one or two of the number may be kept back, and when you inquire for them, he will reply: "Those stones which I returned are not worth much: there was nothing in them to warrant the expenditure of my time and skill; but with the others, the case is far otherwise: they are capable of taking a polish and of bearing a discipline which it may take months and even years to give; but their beauty, when the process is complete, will be all the compensation that can be wished."

Some men pass through life without much trial, because their natures are light and trivial, and incapable of bearing much, or of profiting by the severe discipline which, in the case of others, is all needed, and will yield a rich recompense, after it has had its perfect work. God will not let any one of us be tried beyond what we are able to bear. But when He has in hand a nature like Abraham's, which is capable of the loftiest results, we must not be surprised if the trial is long continued, almost to the last limit of endurance. The patriarch had to wait fifteen years more, making five-and-twenty years in all, between the first promise and its fulfillment in the birth of Isaac.

HIS FAITH WAS COUNTED TO HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

Faith is the seed-germ of righteousness; and, when God sees us possessed of the seed, He counts us as also being in possession of the harvest which lies hidden in its heart. Faith is the tiny seed which contains all the rare perfumes and gorgeous hues of the Christian life, awaiting only the nurture and benediction of God. When a man believes, it is only a matter of education and time to develop that which is already in

embryo within him; and God, to whom the future is already present, accounts the man of faith as dowered with the fruits of righteousness, which are to the glory and praise of God. But there is a deeper meaning still than this -- in the possession through faith of a judicial righteousness in the sight of God.

The righteousness of Abraham resulted not from his works, but from his faith. "He believed God; and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness." "Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was reckoned unto him; but for our sake also, unto whom it shall be reckoned, who believe on Him that raised Jesus our Lord from the dead" (Galatians 3:6; Romans 4:23-24 RV). Oh, miracle of grace! if we trust ever so simply in Jesus Christ our Lord, we shall be reckoned as righteous in the eye of the eternal God. We cannot realize all that is included in those marvelous words. This only is evident, that faith unites us so absolutely to the Son of God that we are ONE with Him for evermore; and all the glory of His character -- not only what He was when He became obedient unto death, but what He is in the majesty of His risen nature -- is reckoned unto us.

Some teach imputed righteousness as if it were something apart from Christ, flung over the rags of the sinner. But it is truer and better to consider it as a matter of blessed identification with Him through faith; so that as He was one with us in being made sin, we are one with Him in being made the Righteousness of God. In the counsels of Eternity that which is true of the glorious Lord is accounted also true of us who, by a living faith, have become members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. Jesus Christ is made unto us Righteousness, and we are accepted in the Beloved. There is nothing in faith, considered in itself, which can account for this marvelous fact of imputation. Faith is only the link of union; but inasmuch as it unites us to the Son of God, it brings us into the enjoyment of all that He is as the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.

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