

Abraham: The Life of Faith - Part 4

by Roy Hession

This sermon emphasizes the importance of faith in trusting God's promises, even when they seem impossible, and how faith is counted as righteousness.

Duration: 52:08

Scripture: Genesis 12:1-2, Genesis 15:5-6, Genesis 21:13, Genesis 22:1-2, Romans 4:3, Romans 4:24-25

Topics: "Abraham"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of trusting in God during difficult and uncertain times. He refers to a quote from Amy Carmichael about the disciples in the boat with Jesus, highlighting the significance of the moments when God's power seems silent and the waves of life are high. The speaker shares personal experiences and examples to illustrate how doubt and fear can lead to misguided attempts to find solutions outside of God's provision. He encourages listeners to have faith and praise God even in the midst of delays and challenges, drawing inspiration from the story of Abraham's faith in God's promises.

Transcript

I've been very conscious that the studies the Lord has given us, and I'm quite confident that it's he who's chosen this theme for us, it might not be of the same universal application as other studies. There are certain words from God that apply to everybody without exception at every moment of time. But I'm very conscious of the fact that in dealing with the life of faith and the situations in which we find ourselves, in which faith is tested, well, there's some that may not be in those situations, but there may be some who are.

And I would suggest that you just remain open to God to interpret your life and your situations in the light of his word, and that perhaps you don't strive too much. Now, how can I apply this to me? I can't quite see I'm in this place or having this difficulty. Don't strive over the matter, just be open.

Maybe God's going to give you something for tomorrow, and he'll know how to bring you back to the words we've thinking about tomorrow. Just be open. On the other hand, he may give you a word about your present life and your present situation, which will indeed be God's liberating word for you.

It's in the very nature of the case that certain studies are obviously designed of God for certain people. Well, what about the people whom it may not at that moment fit so much? You be open. And may God's

got something that's going to help you, as I've said, tomorrow or when you get back.

That's what the word of God is for. It's our armoury, not only for the present, but right the way through coming days. Now, yesterday I said that the promise on which Abraham was called had two parts, that which related to the land, and that which related to his seed.

We saw yesterday and the previous day how Abraham reacted to this promise concerning the land, how his faith failed under certain tests, and how yesterday he really came through to a holy boldness and confidence, which saved him from all those terrible disasters that fell upon Lot, who was a man who didn't believe God and didn't act accordingly. Well, now this morning we speak about the promise that God made to Abraham with regard to his seed, which in a sense was even more important. And we're going to see how poor old Abraham reacted to this promise, and the battles he had with regard to it, before he came through to real victory and confidence.

Will you turn to Genesis chapter 15? This is more or less where we left off yesterday. After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abraham, after having refused the rewards of Sodom, saying, Fear not, Abraham, I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward. And then Abraham opened up on a thing that had been so burdening him, so worrying him, and Abraham said, Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? And Abraham said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed, and no one born in my house is mine heir.

And behold, the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir, but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. And he brought him forth abroad and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars if thou be able to number them. And he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.

And he believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness. So that was a good start. He really rose to the promise.

Not so Sarai, and really and truly not so Abraham, for he was a fully a party to what happened. Chapter 16. Now Sarai, Abraham's wife, bare him no children.

And she had a handmaid, that's a slave girl, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said unto Abraham, Behold now the Lord hath restrained me from bearing. I pray thee, go in unto my maid.

It may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abraham hearkened to the voice of Sarai. And Sarai, Abraham's wife, took Hagar, her maid, the Egyptian, after Abraham had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan.

Ten years, no sign of a child. And every year it was becoming more and more impossible. And so they thought this way out.

And he took this Hagar as she did, and she gave her to her husband Abraham to be his wife. And he went in unto Hagar and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes.

And Sarai said unto Abraham, My wrong be on thee. I don't know why she blamed him, it was her idea in the first place. That's the way it is, isn't it? Must blame somebody.

My wrong be upon thee. I have given my maid into thy bosom, and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes. The Lord judged between me and thee.

But Abraham said unto Sarai, Behold thy maid is in my hand, do to her as it pleases thee. And when Sarai dealt hardly with her, she fled from herself. The next episode is in the story where God comes again and confirms his amazing promise to Abraham.

And went to chapter 17, and when Abraham was 90 years old and nine, 99, don't expect to have children at that age normally. And when Abraham was 99 and nine, 90 years older than nine, the Lord appeared to Abraham and said unto him, I am the almighty God. Walk before me and be thou perfect, and I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.

And Abraham fell on his face, and God talked with his face. As to me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Revised as it, a father of a multitude of nations.

That's wonderful to Abraham. Well, I had to help God out in the first place. He's got a child anyway.

Well, Dana had one. Neither shall thy name anymore be called Abraham, but thy name shall be called Abraham. It means a father of a multitude of nations.

And I will make thee exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. Verse 15. And God said unto Abraham, ask for Sarai thy wife.

Thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah, which means princess, shall her name be. And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her. Yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations.

Nations, kings of people shall be of her. Then Abraham fell upon his face and laughed, and said in his heart, shall a child be born unto him that is a hundred years old, and shall Sarah that is ninety years old bear? And Abraham said unto God, but haven't I helped you out, Lord? O that Ishmael might live before me. Why bother with anything more? Isn't that all right? And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed.

And thou shalt call his name Isaac, which means laughter. You laughed in unbelief, he called him laughter. And I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his feet on.

And the story continues in chapter 18, where the angels come to visit Abraham. And verse 9, and they said unto him, where is Sarah thy wife? And he said, behold in the tent. And he said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of light, and though Sarah thy wife shall have a son.

And Sarah heard it in the tent door which was behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age, and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. Therefore childbearing was medically impossible.

And the Lord said unto Abraham, wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, shall I of a surety bear a child which am old? Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, and according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son. Then Sarah denied, saying, I laugh not. For she was afraid, and he said, nay, but thou didst laugh.

And the final episode that we are concerned with is in chapter 21. And the Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as he had spoken. They then took a tender essence.

But you know the kind of thing took a tender essence when you receive the promise, not merely when you receive the fulfillment of the promise. Well he did think they took a tender essence in Genesis 15. He believed in the Lord.

Then it all went wrong. But God proved himself as good as his word, and sure enough it came to pass. For Sarah conceived, and there Abraham a son in his old age at the set time of which God had spoken to him.

Bang on time. God always is. And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac.

And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac being eight days old as God had commanded him. And Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born unto him. And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear me will laugh with me.

He's rightly called Isaac. She was not laughing in unbelief now, but laughing in joy. And she said, who would have said unto Abraham that Sarah should have given children such? That's always how we feel when God does the impossible.

Who would have thought it? Well you ought to have done, because God said he was going to do it. But still that's how we are. For I born him a son in his old age.

And the child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned. And Sarah saw the son of Agar the Egyptian, which she'd born unto Abraham, mocking. Wherefore she said unto Abraham, cast out this bond woman and her son.

The son of this bond woman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac. And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight, because of his son. And God said unto Abraham, let it not be grievous in thy sight, because of the land, and because of thy bond woman.

In all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice. For in Isaac shall thy seed be called. And also of the son of the bond woman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed.

These are Bible readings, and you know you may not have been in the book of Genesis lately, and this thrilling story so full of teaching may not be all that fresh in your mind. That's why it's right to take time to read it. Well it begins with a real Abraham coming to a real place of faith, with regard to this promise.

He's made this wonderful surrender with regard to the land, and with regard to Sodom. But what about this child he says? The only thing I could see, that's not much of an answer, is that this Eliezer, my steward, if he has a child, well, if I don't have a child, legally he'll be a looker for the child, and all the goods will go to him. But Lord that's not what you had in mind, no it isn't, says God.

And he takes him abroad, and bids him look at those starry skies. And we know how great is the multitude of those stars, much more than Abraham did. And God said, so shall thy seed be.

And though it seemed absolutely impossible, because Sarai was barren, and such a glorious nation to come from him, he could hardly believe it, he did believe it. He took God at his word, and then God said, he counted it to him for righteousness. Well now, we begin by faith, we begin our Christian life by faith, but with regard to all sorts of other things, we endearably start well.

It may be that God calls some life to service, in one form or another. Could be missionary service, it could be to the ministry, could be to take the leadership of that young people's fellowship, or to even take a meeting, or do something like that. And you have your doubts, who am I, how can I do that, who am I, and so on.

Or it may be he allows you to become into a predicament, where God has obviously got to come in and do something for you, the very predicament presupposes God. And you have your doubts, as Abraham did, and then you come through to faith. And that young person dares to believe that weak as they are, inexperienced as they are, if God's calling, he will eclipse, he quits, and join to him, they can go forth, and do what otherwise they wouldn't dare to do.

So they come through to faith, or in that predicament. Well God's just got to do something, and oh you're so full of doubts, and he loves to come near, and reaffirm his promises to you in one way or another. And like Abraham, you believe in the Lord.

It's going to be done. Faith, mighty faith, the promise is, and look to that alone. Laugh at impossibility, and cry, it shall be done.

Yes, you're going to have, I'm going to have times when I'm going to be in predicament, or I'm going to be called to things which are utterly beyond me, but God does give me the promise, I am thy shield, and exceeding great reward, and we won't move forward until we've got through to a place of confidence in that promise, and act accordingly. If you'd like to see how Paul describes this great faith of Abraham, you can see it in Romans 4. Verse 18. Who against hope, believed in hope, for 18, that he might be the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, so shall thy seed be.

And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about a hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb. He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God, being fully persuaded that what he had promised, he was able also to perform. What a wonderful summary of all that constituted this step of faith.

He believed in the Lord, and that's what it is. Faith isn't sort of saying, well it's pretty easy, I believe God will do it. No, God makes promise about things that seem impossible.

That you, you know yourself should be saved. That you should be called to that work or this work. That for you, in that difficult, impossible predicament, he's got the perfect answer just round the corner.

And you have your struggle, but you come through. At least if you don't come through, you haven't come through, you're nowhere. But we do so often begin this way.

And we are enabled to rise in faith. We consider not the impossibilities of the situation. We consider not the futility, the emptiness in our own experience, that we say, all right Lord, I'm not going to stagger at the promise of unbelief.

I take my eyes off myself and my deficiencies. I take my eyes off the difficulties of the situation, all the things that seem to block my way. And we become strong in faith, giving glory to God, that what he has obviously impromised and implied, in the situation, he is able also to perform.

And there's a great moment. And we've got to come to them. You won't move a single step forward until you do, until I do.

And when we do take those stands of faith, there's a very special blessing upon us. Although the promise as yet has not been fulfilled, you come through to this glorious stand of faith. Before I talk about the special blessing, it occurs to me we ought to look at the, the definition of faith in Hebrews 11.

I'm surprised that we hadn't made more of this really. Now I come to think of it because this is the classic definition of what faith is. Hebrews 11 verse 1. Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Faith takes things promised and hoped for, which have not yet become realized as polished substance and set out on. You can't feel any power going through you. You can't see any resources in yourself, but Christ says, I am thy shield.

Lord, I said, I can't do it. He says, who said you were able to do it? What pride to think you had to do it? Am not I thy light? By the way, remember that when you see people, oh Lord, I can't do it, it's a lot of pride. God says, who said you could? Who art thou that should be afraid? I never said you could.

This is going to be done by me in you. And you're intruding, so who I can't? Oh, there are many transactions that have to be made, do nothing here before we come into that place of faith which enables us to go on to the next step. Faith is the substance of things hoped for.

Faith is treating things promised and hoped for as solid substance and set it out upon. Faith treads upon the ceiling void and as it does so finds the rock beneath. But it is always stepping out into a ceiling void.

Young person, going back even to concept Christ after your conversion here, it will be like stepping out into a ceiling void that you act and obey that he's going to do for me what he said. He's going to be all that I need. He's going to be great.

You'll find it is God's solid rock. And the special blessing that always rests upon us when we do it is what happened to Abraham. He believed in the Lord and God counted it to him for righteousness.

Faith was counted to Abraham for a righteousness which he doesn't otherwise possess. And you know when God sees us refusing to look at impossibilities, against hope, believing in hope and committing ourselves to Jesus and daring to venture out with him, he counts that to us for a righteousness that we don't otherwise possess. You're not all that special.

You can't point to a holiness but if there's this daring faith, God says I'm going to count that faith to you for a righteousness. That's really all I want for my children because I then will be all they need. Of course Paul makes use of this thing, this verse here in Genesis 15 to tell us that the great thing that we have to believe in, first before we do anything else, is to believe on him.

That raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered for our offenses and raised for our justification. And he tells us that that can be just about as difficult as Abraham believing he was going to have a seed when he was past age. I tell you a truth, dare to believe that you're accounted right with God for the sake of the blood of Jesus.

Sometimes when you're oppressed with sin and know what a failure you are, there's almost more than you can do. You know I can't take it as easy as that. And that's the reason in Romans 4, Abraham's faith against these impossibilities is given as an illustration of the faith that believes that God justifies the ungodliness.

I have two battles I must confess again and again. The first battle I have is to admit I'm wrong. I'm awfully unwilling to admit I'm wrong.

I suppose we all are. Especially in certain situations with certain people have to come out with it. They hate it, it's a death.

But once I've admitted I'm wrong, I have another battle, and that's to believe I'm right. Because God says now that you've admitted you're wrong, you're right. I am the one who justifies, declares right, those who admit they're wrong.

I justify the ungodliness. And I tell you it takes some believing. You've just got to take God's word for it.

The blood is enough for God. Powerful blood did once occur tonight, please, before the show. And you know it isn't enough to admit you're wrong.

You aren't in victory until you believe you're right through the blood of Christ. Then the freedom, then you've got a testimony. It's not a testimony only to say I've seen I'm wrong.

Having seen it, you've got to come to the place of praise. Praise the Lord, I'm saved. Praise the Lord, I'm as right now with God as the blood can make me.

Praise the Lord, my rightness with God is not even my repentance. Repentance does not put you right with God. You can repent and repent and repent and be down in the dumps.

The more you repent, the deeper down in the dumps you can be. You've got to repent. But that's not our righteousness.

Behold him there, the risen lamb. My perfect, spotless righteousness. He was delivered from my attention.

But because that death was enough for all my sins and the world's sins, God raised him again and declared himself satisfied with Christ on my behalf. And well I know what deep praise is, can I believe it? Can I come through to freedom? Well that is the use which Paul makes of this verse in Genesis 15. He believed this impossible thing and God imputed it to him for righteousness.

Wherefore it shall be imputed to us also, he says, if we believe on him. That raised Jesus our Lord from the dead as a sign of his complete satisfaction with that work he did for you on our behalf, say that we do. Well now I'm not going to expound more on that because it's a digression.

It's a digression. Now this is the theme I think that God wants us to get onto. I couldn't have left that verse.

It's the greatest verse of the book of Genesis as far as Paul was concerned. He based the great message of the gospel in Romans on that one about faith being accounted to Abraham for righteousness. But when we come to this life of Abraham, this is the point as I see it.

This dear man, difficult as it was, came right through to this faith of confidence as though it's been possible. I'm going to take God's word for it that I'm going to have a seed and it's going to be just what God says come up. Having got there, God then began to test that.

It was there, clearly there, once there, now says God, I'm going to test it. Only so will it become true faith, will it grow and develop and withstand any attack. And the way by which God tested this joyous faith of

Abraham was delay, delay.

What a test it was. That's been there year after year, even after Genesis 15, and no sign of a seed. Sarah getting older, he getting older, and then it's ceasing to be with Sarah after the manner of women.

Notice, God hadn't changed his mind. He was tested. That test, he was testing to see what sort of a conception Abraham had of Jehovah.

Would he cast away his confidence, which had great recompense of reward? Would he say it's no good, the whole thing was a hallucination? Now, when God has brought it through to a place of test, I don't know, once again it's difficult to apply this because we're all in such different circumstances, but just for sake of argument, a young person who's really been willing, well Lord, if you're calling me, I'm ready. Or in this predicament, Lord, I know you're good. Give the right provision.

All right, we've come through. The delicacy that God tests, tests. And you know, faith is the one thing that God tests.

I'm not going to say he tested, I don't think he tested on love, in life. Now, let's test his love. I don't think he tests your brokenness.

If I don't see it written in the scripture, there are things that test it. He doesn't test your patience. He doesn't test your determination.

He doesn't test your good character. But all the tests of God are on the faith front. This is the very basis from which all the other precious virtues grow.

Will you turn to 1 Peter 1, verse 7. Verse 7, that the trial of your faith being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, might be sound of the praise and honor and glory at the tearing of Jesus' cross. Not the trial of your love, or the trial of your patience, not the trial of your determination, the trial of your faith. And then in 1 Timothy 6, 12, we have the whole Christian life described along these lines.

1 Please turn the cassette over now. Do not fast wind it in either direction. 1 Timothy 6, 12.

Fight the good fight of faith. The fight is a fight of faith. And it seems to me the fight is this.

With the devil at one end of the promises of you and the other, it's a tug of war. It has nothing in it, nothing in it. God couldn't use you, nothing's going to happen.

And you and the other are clinging on for dear life. It's a fight of faith. And then in the epistle of John, we see here what victory is in the first epistle of John, verse 4, chapter 5, verse 4. This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith.

You see, victory is coming in fast. Defeat is when you're doubting. Faith is when everything's still against you, but you're buoyant, you're praising.

It's a victory of faith. And faith is the one thing that God tests, and maybe that's what we're in. And the one way in which, one of the greatest ways in which God tests, the faith that's already there, is delay.

Delay. And after that, more delay. And after that, more delay.

Oh Abraham, as he saw those stars, embraced the promise, and he thought the thing was going to happen next year, but it didn't. And the next year, and it didn't. And ten years went by, and all that was the biggest test to Abraham's faith.

Now I know what that is. I felt sometimes I had been like suspended by a thread. I remember when things went wrong, and doors were closed, and I was without any opportunities of service or means of support.

He said, lie at rest, wait at night, and the devil said, you're finished at 40. And he showed me others who were really blossoming at 40, but I was finished. How did I stand that? I want to tell you, you can only call runs when you're bold.

Those are the best moments of your life. It's nothing to say hallelujah after the answer's come, but you say hallelujah in the in-between moments. Francis, it's Amy Carmichael, one of her poems has the line, the age-long minute when thou art silent and the waves are high.

She's thinking of the disciples in the boat, and he's asleep. And there are the waves, and they wake him. Maybe it took him about 60 seconds to get to his feet and take charge of the situation, but those 60 seconds were an age.

The age-long minute when thou art silent and the waves are high. Those are the most important minutes in the world. That's the only time when you can score runs.

The bowling is coming down, the devil's saying it's hopeless, nothing's going to happen. And he's going to give you the age-long minute again and again. I've had it, you're going to have it, we're all going to have it.

It's the only way in which faith grows, in which confidence, in the sufficiency and grace of God. Delay. And so it is, the great word again and again in the Psalms is, wait on the Lord.

What are we going to do? Wait. Nothing's happened. What are we going to do? Wait.

And after that, what do? Wait. Wait, I say, on the Lord. And that's the hardest thing any of us can do.

Wait for God. Give God time. And wait in holy confidence that the situation is every bit as much in his hands as ever it was.

Only so do we really get into this other realm, where we walk by faith and not by sight. Would you turn to Hebrews 6, verse 12? Hebrews 6, verse 12. And here's a reference in the New Testament once again to Abraham's faith.

He says, I desire that you be not slothful, Hebrews 6, 12, but followers of them who through faith, listen to that next word, and patience, and the Greek word is endurance, stickability, doesn't give up because the thing isn't fulfilled overnight, through faith and patience they run right into the inheritance of the promise. And then he goes on to say, for when God made promise to Abraham that God he could swear by no greater, he swear by himself saying, surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply, so that after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. Patiently endured.

How often that happens to someone who really had a tremendous transaction, they thought they were called of God and they believed God that even they could descend. And then immediately, delay, difficulty, postponement, opposition, parents against it. And the only ones who ever get out to the mission field it seems today are those who patiently endure, who don't lose sight of the promise, whose faith gets all the

stronger, or it ought to, as the difficulties seem to increase, that's God's ideal.

And will you please notice a rather sweet thing, it says after he had patiently endured, well actually we'll see in a moment, it was the one thing that Abraham didn't do, this is where he failed. But because he ultimately repented of what he did, he is regarded by God as having patiently endured. Isn't that good of God? And you know the blood of Christ is so efficacious that when things are repented, they're just not there.

And when God writes the story of your life, there were many lapses in faith. You took steps aside, you got tied up, you got, went into the world, you adopted, wrongly exceeded, but you repented and the blood of Christ cleansed it. And when the story is written of your life, you say, oh how that man believed.

He believed the promise, he didn't doubt, he never deflected. Why the blood is expunged, everything else. You repented and God regards you as having patiently endured, and indeed that is the way to patiently endure, is by repenting when you don't, and doing so ever more quickly, when doubts come.

And God says, look at him kindly. He says, Lord I've been so doubtful of doubt, look at him kindly. So that's the record of our dear brother Abraham.

Yes, we sing sometimes in these hymns, I know not what the future holds, but I know who holds the future. Well, when there's no great test upon you, it's very easy to sing. But when the test is upon you, and when the test is delayed, well it's important that the answer should come, and it doesn't come.

Can you say, I know not what the future holds, but I know who holds the future. Well now, Abraham failed in this test. As I said earlier, Abraham learned faith through his failures in the path of faith, and so do we.

Well, the story of his failure, of course, is in that chapter 16. It really began with Sarah, and it infected Abraham. I would suggest, realize that your unbelief can affect the one who's with you.

It's contagious. And nothing happened ten years, no seed. And of course, seed was tremendously important, more so in the east then, so perhaps here, though God knows it's a big trial for a couple to be childless, but I believe it was much more a trial in those days.

And Sarah says, I know God promised us a seed, and so much hinges on it. I've got an idea. He says, you take my slave girl, go in unto her, conceive seed by her, and I'll regard that as my seed, and that will fulfill the promise.

Then we can go on from there. She was really trying to help God out, trying to help God fulfill his promises, and doing so by her own cleverness, by some meek contrivance of her own. And of course, Abraham was fully a party to it.

Now this is the sort of failure that comes to us when God is testing faith, because the thing doesn't come immediately. Our danger is, listen to this, to resort to striving. Now you may have heard people, even here, talk about striving.

And unless you know what people mean, it can be misleading. Is there no activity in the Christian life? Do we look with suspicion on anybody active for God or striving? No, no. I tell you what I think striving is.

It is the substitution of the activity of the flesh, that is the activity of self, for the activity of faith. When faith is joyous and dominant in your life, then there's a right cooperation with Jesus. Activity.

But it's born of faith. You know he's with you. You know the old chariot wheel is running along.

You know that things are working out and you just do the next thing to cooperate. But there's another activity which is born of doubt, which is my own self-contrived activity, which is nothing more than an attempt to get to help God or help myself out, instead of waiting for the divine answer in the divine way. And that is what they did.

It was striving. We could do it in small matters, in Christian service. We can do it in larger matters.

I find it difficult to give too many illustrations, because if I illustrated one form of striving, it would leave another form of striving out. But I believe we've got to see striving as something we've got to judge and repent. And the Holy Spirit can show you what is striving, what is really born of unbelief and doubting and trusting and self-effort, which is really the substituting of my activity to get things moving, to get God's promises fulfilled, rather than the activity that results by holy confidence.

I've got it in the bag because Jesus is coming. There. There's all the difference in the world.

Now I can't possibly tell you where the line is drawn between the two. But it's part of our spiritual education to learn that. It's so important.

Well, this most certainly was. It was striving. And in Abraham's case, it only brought terrible trouble.

It didn't help at all. Striving never does. It only involves you in more trouble and more complications, and it leaves wretched legacies that sometimes you've got to live with for years, when all the time God had got some deficit.

He was only trying to cause faith to grow, and he delayed, but faith doubted and then resorted to its own effort, its own clever contrivances, some little scheme. Oh, I've seen so much of it, and I know it in my own life. Dear friend of mine called to live for the gospel by faith, doubted whether God could provide his need, and so he did what he called a little tape-making.

And he felt that if he started a special organisation to produce tape commercially, that that would help him, but it only landed him dead. Jesus was enough, so he could do all sorts of illustrations, all sorts of illustrations. I really want not to try and give illustrations, because we want God to apply to each one his own circumstance, not waiting for God.

An itch to do. If I don't do, nothing will be done. What a thing it is.

And you invariably do the wrong thing, as Abraham did. Well, the trouble that came to him was the fact that as soon as Hagar realised she was going to have a child, she was one up on her mystery. And of course Sarah didn't appreciate that, and there was trouble.

There were terrible rows in the home. Abraham said, what's going on round there? Oh, it's those two again. There was no peace in that home.

And eventually poor old Hagar said, I can't stick this, I'm going. She took her baby and she ran, didn't know where she was going. She had to come back eventually.

And then when at last Ishmael, Isaac was born, you just thought, well that's all over. Ishmael, who was about 12 years old by now, he was having that feast, he was standing in the corner of the super city, after

he was the oldest. And Sarah caught sight of him.

And the cat was in the fire again. She says, Abraham, you've got to get rid of that woman and her kid. And Abraham had come to love that boy, but he had to do it.

And he had to live with it. And so it is with us. You'll get yourself into awful complications.

Well, I mean, there's one obvious application of this. It applies especially to young people. I've mentioned it before.

Forgive me if I think I'm drumming too much on it, but you take this question of being willing to wait for God with regard to a life partner. You won't trust. You won't believe he's got his best.

And even if it isn't a life partner, it's still the very best for you. A perfect blueprint. You've got to work for Jesus.

None but you can do. Some married, some single. But it's just the same.

But we don't believe it. And we're tempted to grab. We make a wrong choice.

And you've got to live with the situation for the rest of your day. Well, that's only one application. But all these ishmaels of our own producers, they really are absurd.

The trouble. What you would have been scared if it had gone the Lord's way. I want to tell you the way of transgression is always hard.

You're not going to make it better your way ultimately at all. For a bit, it seems you've got what you wanted. But sooner or later you're going to find that that ishmael is ruining and wrecking everything.

And the precious promise of purpose of God for your life is poised. And you become an ultimate black slider, maybe. Well, that's it.

Well now, how did this end? And how does it end with us? Because I don't want really to utter merely words of warning, because in one degree or another, in one level or another, we've all produced ishmael. May not be in all, in larger matters, in smaller matters. Because you wouldn't wait for God and try to rush ahead.

Things have gone wrong. Maybe even the way we try to win others, and we feel we can't wait for God, and we act with self-effort, we only succeed in making the situation worse. We put our foot in it.

No, he won't listen. Now he hates us. And he says, I was wrong, I wasn't waiting, I was striving.

Well, it isn't a possible ishmael, but the ishmaels that are already there, at any and every level. Well, what do we do? What did Abraham do? Well, do you think I'm reading too much in? I do think Abraham, I'm sure he did, come to repent of it. When God said, I'm going to give Sarah a son, oh, she's too old.

What won't ishmael do? I'm not interested in ishmael, she's going to have a son. And I think Abraham had to repent. Now there's the first thing we have to do.

When you've produced an ishmael, don't try to do anything more than it's the truth, I was wrong. It was a product of my unbelief, it was mere striving. I wasn't waiting on the Lord for his provision.

Don't try and turn over a new leaf, turn back the past, and say, Lord, I was wrong. That's always the first thing. Peter on the day of Pentecost was asked by the people, when they knew that they had crucified the Messiah, men and brethren, what shall we do? Do you know what his answer was? And Peter said, repent.

And whenever you say, whatever am I going to do now? Will you remember that Peter said, repent. And Peter said, repent. Whenever you find yourself saying, whatever am I going to do now? I've got into a mess, I've done the wrong thing.

Peter said, repent. It's always the most againststest thing we can do, it's always the way out, the first step out of any predicament. And that's hard because you say, well, he felt all right, very good idea, and he's a nice boy.

Yes, he is. But doesn't God, what's in God's service? Repent. If you've made a wrong marriage, go to the divorce court.

No, no, but repent. I've known those who've gone to their husbands and said, you know, I married you out of the will of God, I'm sorry. I'm not going to leave you, oh no.

But I want you to know, I've got a testimony at last. The grace has reached me, forgiveness has come to me. You repent.

You don't do anything at first about the situation. In the middle of it, you repent. And in the middle of that situation, which can sometimes be very painful, if nothing else has changed, you've got peace with God.

The blood of Christ comes into view whenever a man repents. Jonah sinned, he was cast into the belly of the whale. But if any one thing had happened there, he repented.

And although the situation was worse, rather than better, was worse to be in the belly of the whale than in the belly of the ship, there was this great change. Jonah was praising, hallelujah. Well, if I go down to death, I'm going to go crazy.

The situation is worse, but I've got peace. I'm forgiven. I'm restored to fellowship with God.

That's the first thing. And you go into that situation with peace and a song. Even to that unfortunate marriage, you walk around forgiven.

Oh no, God doesn't want you to break these legal and sacred bonds. Not at all. But in the middle of it, you're a forgiven man, a forgiven woman.

The next thing is the willingness to live with my mistakes for just as long as God wants me to. And he will use my very mistakes as a discipline to holiness. I find them difficult to bear.

I'm to live with. And I'm to accept their disciplines as something that comes from the loving hand of a loving Heavenly Father, to keep me humble, to keep me at his feet, to keep me repentant. I made a grievous mistake.

I jumped from one piece of work to another, and oh, I found I was in the frying pan, out of the frying pan into the fire. And I repented. And I said, God said, don't do anything at this moment to try and get yourself out.

I would have loved to have told the folks I'd made a mistake, please may I leave. No, God said no. Live there with it.

And what a discipline it was to meet an unfriendly committee, month after month, and seek to bear, seek to bow your head, to live with it. And I thought, oh, I thought, well, I put myself in this situation. I'm going to live with it forever until, Lord, I'm willing.

I made one mistake, I don't want to make another. And what a blessing, and Jesus is with you, as you're willing, in humility and brokenness, to live with your mistakes for as long as God wants you to. Where there's wrong, you put it right.

Of course, you make restitution. But that may still, you may still find yourself in a difficult situation. You live with Jesus, with your mistakes, for as long as he wants you to.

And so often the time comes when the situation is changed. When he gives you the word now, Ishmael can go. I'm never, I'm not suggesting, please don't think it.

There comes a time when it says, all right, you can take divorce proceedings. He never says that. But he knows how to change the situation and bring you out.

It was so in my case, there came a time when I was chucked out. That was the time to go. I would have liked to have gone before, but I was chucked out.

And they thought it was a terrible thing they were asking me to do, and they did it with great hesitancy, but I said, hallelujah, Lord. And anyway, the time came when peace settled on the Abraham household, and God told him, let Hagar go. One last thing, but God had a tender plan for Hagar and her child.

You say, what if I, if I really give up that thing, a wrong association, what's going to happen? You obey God. God knows how to look after the others who've been wronged, the others to whom you've done damage. Be clear, cut it, that's it.

Tell that girl, tell that man, it's finished. What would happen to him? He couldn't live without me. You leave that to God.

And God said, I've got a plan for Ishmael. I'll look after him. But you go on now on the old course where you ought to be all the time.

And so here's the story of Abraham and his Ishmael. And the happy issue out of all is affliction. So may it be for each one of us.

Let us pray. Lord Jesus, we do thank thee for thy holy word. It does indeed guide our footsteps.

It does indeed open our lives to our eyes, and we see where we are. Above all, we see that we're dealing with a very loving, gracious, heavenly father, and a savior who died for our sins and these terrible mistakes we've made, whose grace is capable of recovering all and bringing a happy issue out of all our afflictions. We thank thee for this in Jesus' name.

Amen. The grace of our Lord and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.

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