

Oneness With God in the Heavenly Nature of Everything (Continued)

by T. Austin-Sparks

We can learn from the experiences of Abraham and other Old Testament figures by standing on supernatural ground and not compromising on people or principles.

Scripture: Judges 14:3, Romans 15:4, Galatians 5:1, Hebrews 11:16, Hebrews 11:39 - 12:2

Topics: "Faith", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the theme of oneness with God through the experiences of Abraham, illustrating how the Old Testament figures, despite their mistakes, were part of a divine plan that is now revealed to us. He highlights that Abraham's journey reflects our spiritual pilgrimage, where mistakes serve as lessons for growth and understanding of God's promises. Sparks points out that God's dealings with His people often require them to learn through failures, as seen in Abraham's compromises and the consequences that followed. Ultimately, he encourages believers to recognize their calling to a supernatural life, relying solely on God to navigate their spiritual journey. The sermon concludes with the reminder that we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses who have triumphed through faith.

Transcript

"And these all, having had witness borne to them through their faith, received not the promise, God having provided some better thing concerning us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect. Therefore let us also, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 11:39-12:2).

The Bible teaches us that people of the Old Testament went through experiences of which they never understood the full meaning. The real meaning was hidden from their eyes. All that they knew was that they were under the hand of God, and that there was something more in their experiences of His dealings with them than they knew.

The Bible also teaches that that meaning, which was hidden from them, has been revealed to us in this present dispensation. We have the light on their experiences which they did not possess. The things which happened to them, and the ways in which they were led, had a spiritual meaning which waited for our time for its unveiling, so that we know the meaning of them while they did not. In the light which has now come

to us we are able to see the meaning of their lives and to read the Old Testament in a new way.

So in our consideration of the life of Abraham we are able to see that the events in his life represent something for us. "These all, having had witness borne to them through their faith, received not the promise, God having provided (or foreseen) some better thing concerning us, that apart from us they should not be made complete." There was something incomplete about their experience, and we have got that something.

Thus we come back to consider these steps in the life of Abraham, steps in a spiritual pilgrimage which begins in the world and ends in the heart of God. In our last meditation we began to consider the third step, that is, oneness with God in the heavenly nature of things, and we considered it from the positive standpoint, how that God had done a deep thing in Abraham which made it impossible for him to be satisfied with anything in this world. As the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews says: "They desire a better country, that is, a heavenly" (Hebrews 11:16).

Now we are going to look at this from what we may call the negative standpoint, though that is only a way of speaking, for there is nothing negative about God's dealings with His people. What I mean is this: that this great reality of the heavenly nature of things was made known to Abraham by his mistakes, and this is one of the necessary methods of God with us. God would not let us make mistakes if we were different people from what we are, but He knows quite well that most of His children will never learn anything except by making mistakes. You may tell a little child a hundred times that it will get burnt if it puts its finger in the fire, but most children will not believe that until they have tried it, and then they know by experience what they cannot know by theory - they know in life what they could not learn by doctrine.

Some years ago I went to a great engineering factory, and there I saw them melting steel. I watched them pouring the molten steel into vessels, and we all had to stand well away. Even the hot air round about was cold to that steel, so that as it came out into the air it just flew out all over the place. I said to one of the men who was pouring out this steel: 'Do you know that it is said that if you put your arm into cold water and then put it into that steel, you would not feel it?' He replied: 'I have been doing this for years, but if you like to try it you can. Theory or no theory, I know all about molten steel, and I am not engaging in any experiments.'

The Lord knows quite well that you and I will never really learn unless we make mistakes. We do not enjoy pointing out the mistakes of great servants of God, but it is impressive that He has had these things written in His Word, and the Scripture says: "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning" (Romans 15:4), and the mistakes are included in the "things written aforetime". Thus they were written for our learning.

Great as this man Abraham was, he made three big mistakes in his life, and we only take note of them in order that we may learn not to make those mistakes.

The first one is recorded in the twelfth chapter of the Book of Genesis. Abraham had been commanded by God to leave his own country and go to another country which God would show him. He obeyed and went into the land of Canaan where he lived for some time. Then there arose a famine in that land, and that meant quite a serious crisis for Abraham. Naturally the question would arise: 'Did God send me here to let me starve to death? This looks like an absolute contradiction on His part. All that He has commanded and promised now seems to be a big question. I am in the place where He has put me, and circumstances say that it is impossible for a man to live here.' It certainly was a big test of faith! We shall come to the

explanation later on, but it is here that Abraham made his first great mistake. He took his journey down into Egypt. Now, it must have been something that was very carefully thought about. You will remember that later on Israel took that journey in the opposite direction, and it says then that it is eleven days' journey from Egypt just to the border of Canaan, but Abraham was not just on the border. He was right in the land, so that he had to contemplate an eleven days' journey across the desert at least, and you do not do that sort of thing without serious thought. I only say that to indicate how serious this thing was.

Abraham went down into Egypt, for he thought that that was the way to save his life. But do you know, when we do things like that we only - as we say - jump out of the frying-pan into the fire!

On the journey something came to Abraham's mind. He looked at his wife, Sarah, and he said to her: 'Sarah, you know, you are a very beautiful woman, and when you get down into Egypt Pharaoh may take notice of you. You know, Sarah, you are not only my wife; you are also my sister, so if any questions arise about you when we are in Egypt, you just say that you are my sister.'

Now there are two things in that connection. Abraham was prepared to compromise his own wife to save his own life, and he was not only going down geographically, he was descending from the high level of principle to the low level of policy. When we sacrifice people for policy, we do not get out of our difficulties: we make them worse. Let me say to the young men and young women, as to everybody, that it is never a safe thing to compromise on people. If God has called you to Himself, He has called you on to heavenly ground, and that ground is the ground of heavenly principles. The peril of many a young man or young woman is to compromise with this world in order to gain some advantage, and to compromise is always a half-truth. It is what we call 'a white lie'. It was quite true that Sarah was Abraham's sister, but that was only half the truth. So Abraham resorted to a half-truth to gain some advantage, as he thought. We shall be tested sooner or later on this thing - as to whether we will compromise in order to gain some advantage in this world.

You can read what happened. God plagued Pharaoh because of what he did over Sarah, and Pharaoh said to Abraham: 'What is this you have done? You have told me a lie.' Abraham brought dishonour upon the name of the Lord before the world because of compromise. Pharaoh sent Abraham away and he had to take that long journey back to the place where he had built his altar. The altar always represents the Cross, and the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ always represents no compromise with this world. There is no place for a lie in the Cross of the Lord Jesus! Let us learn this lesson! To arrive at last in the heart of God we have to stand very strongly, even if we die for it, on the truth. We will come back to that again presently.

The second great mistake that Abraham made was with Hagar, and Ishmael was the result. You know your Bibles well enough to make it unnecessary for me to tell the story. God was trying Abraham's faith on the ground of patience. He had promised Abraham a son by Sarah, but the years went on. Abraham, ten years older than Sarah, was an old man, and Sarah was getting an old woman, so the situation seemed absolutely hopeless. As they were talking it over and wondering how God's promise could ever be fulfilled, Hagar passed by the opening in their tent, and an idea came into Sarah's mind: 'It is impossible with me. Try it with Hagar', and Abraham accepted the suggestion.

What does this say to us? 'The situation seems to be impossible naturally. Let us then try by the energy of the flesh to realize what seems impossible in the spirit.' So Abraham descended from the level of faith in God to the level of faith in his own works. It was a case of trying to be spiritually fruitful by fleshly methods.

Thus Hagar was introduced.

Now there are two things to note about this. Hagar was an Egyptian, and how did they come to have an Egyptian in their service? When did an Egyptian come into the family? Well, we cannot answer that question with certainty, but we know that Pharaoh did not send Abraham away empty-handed. That may answer the question. But what does Egypt represent? I have only to remind you of Israel in Egypt! The one word which always described Egypt was 'bondage'. If we descend to the level of the flesh to try and help God out, we will only get into worse bondage; and there resulted the terrible tragedy of Ishmael and Hagar. The Apostle Paul makes a great deal of this thing in his Letter to the Galatians, where he speaks of Hagar as the bondswoman and says: "With freedom did Christ set us free: stand fast therefore, and be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage" (Galatians 5:1). So Abraham learned the great lesson that we, being heavenly people, must stand on heavenly ground. We must not come down on to the ground of the flesh to try and help God out of what we think is His difficulty.

Abraham had to learn the lesson by failure, but did he learn it? I am terribly sorry to have to say that he did not seem to have done so very thoroughly, because some time afterward we find him going down to the country of the Philistines and, strange to say, he resorted to the same old subterfuge. Again, it was exactly the same thing: 'Sarah, you say that you are my sister.' You can hardly believe it, can you? How slow we are to learn these lessons!

Well, he went to the country of the Philistines and Abimelech just came out on the same ground - he took Sarah from Abraham. How merciful and faithful God is! That night He appeared to Abimelech in a dream and said to him: 'Abimelech, you are a dead man', and Abimelech explained to Him why he had taken Sarah, as Abraham had said that she was his sister. When Abimelech got up in the morning he called Abraham and said: 'What is this that you have done? You have lied to me and have brought me near to destruction.' The details are almost exactly like the Egyptian occasion, but not quite. These are not the Egyptians, but the Philistines. All that you know about the Egyptians tells you that they would never have anything to do with what was of God. As with Pharaoh in the time of Moses, who would fight God to the last moment, Egypt would never have anything to do with divine things - but the Philistines were always trying to get their hands on divine things. They tried to get possession of the land. They were always invading it, even until the days of David. Their one ambition was to get hold of the ark of the covenant, and when they did get it, they opened it to have a look inside. These people were always very interested in divine things, but do you remember the description which was always applied to them? The "uncircumcised Philistines" (Judges 14:3). They represent uncrucified flesh trying to get hold of the things of God, the people of the senses in relation to the things of God. They are that which wants to 'see with the natural eyes, hear with the natural ears and handle with the natural hands', while their hearts have never gone to the Cross to be circumcised.

Abraham went down to the Philistines. What a descent from a heavenly level to an earthly, from the spiritual to the natural! When a servant of God does that, he always brings God into dishonour.

I think Abraham did learn his lesson this time, for we do not read again of anything like that.

Do you see the way into the heart of God? I said that I would give you an explanation of the whole thing.

Do you not recognize that God always puts His people on to supernatural ground? The life of the child of God has to be a supernatural thing altogether. It has to be a continuous miracle. That is a very difficult position, but if you look at God's dealings with His servants in the Bible you will always see this: that He

has put them on to a supernatural ground. That means that only God Himself can meet the situation. No one else can get us through. Our own flesh and energy cannot do so, nor can our own natural wisdom, as with Pharaoh and Abimilech.

Whether it was Abraham, or Moses, or Elijah, or any other one, they were put on to this ground where only God could see them through, and He would not give His glory to another.

Now look at Hebrews chapter twelve! All this great host of witnesses has been collected together, having all come at last to the victory, and they are represented as gathered in the great grandstand of Heaven, as though they were looking at us... "We are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses". Go back to chapter eleven and pick up each one singly. On the one side their situation was an altogether impossible one naturally. On the other side, therefore, every one of them is a miracle of God. Their arrival in victory at the end of the race is a supernatural thing, and their God is our God, and we are called in that way. It is a difficult way and it does not get easier as we go on, but God is able to make every one of us a miracle of His grace.

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