

The Committed Life

by Watchman Nee

The sermon emphasizes the importance of a committed life through Abraham's journey, highlighting God's purpose, the necessity of witness, and the significance of fellowship in the Church.

Scripture: Genesis 12:6-8, Genesis 13:18, John 4:14, Acts 7:2, Romans 12:1, Galatians 3:29, Hebrews 3:6, 1 John 5:19

Topics: "Commitment to God", "Fellowship in the Church"

Description

Watchman Nee emphasizes the significance of a committed life through the example of Abraham, who was called by God during a time of great moral decline. God revealed Himself to Abraham, sharing His plans and establishing a covenant that included a land and a people to bear witness to His glory. The sermon highlights the importance of building altars in our lives, representing our commitment to God, and the necessity of fellowship within the Church as a reflection of the Body of Christ. Nee stresses that true knowledge and strength come from a shared life in Christ, rather than mere information or individualism. Ultimately, the message calls believers to recognize their role as witnesses in the world, rooted in the life and strength that comes from God.

Transcript

THROUGH the period from Adam to Abraham God spoke to men. We are not told, however, that He appeared to them. His first appearance was to Abraham in Mesopotamia (Acts 7. 2). God was there laying claim to a man. This was a fresh move on His part; and here in Canaan is another. In the Flood God had judged the whole world; He had not touched and claimed any land for Himself. But now in Abraham He has got the man of His choice in the land of His choice, and so now He appears to him here.

At the time when this man was called out of Ur of the Chaldees, the state of things in the world as a whole had become so bad it could not well have been worse. Through the long years only Enoch had been translated. Out of the disaster of the Flood one family alone had been saved alive. Now in Abraham's world things were no better. The ark had not failed, but the family who were saved had done so. The outcome of that generation was the conspiracy at Babel, and then world-wide idolatry.

But God was not defeated. He had not failed, however much it might seem as though He had. After all this, He-the God of glory-revealed Himself. For He is Omega as well as Alpha. He outlasts and transcends all human failure. Nothing is more stable, more enduring than the glory of God. Man's glory fades and fails; His is unailing and unfading. There is no way of thwarting God. He cannot be defeated. After two thousand years of the world's sin (or however long the period may have been) He is revealed as still the

God of glory! There is always new hope in Him.

Abraham was the first friend of God. He had a share in God's thoughts. God not only revealed Himself to Abraham but also shared His plans with him, made known to him His intentions. 'I am not going to work a sudden miracle from heaven; I shall work through you.'

This astounding plan of God's must have been most difficult for Abraham to grasp. For us it is not too difficult to understand the fact of personal salvation, to appreciate that God has come so far at so great a cost to rescue us in our state of extreme need; but when it comes to the matter of God's purpose, our finite minds are just not big enough to grasp it. So here we find that God not only showed Himself to Abraham but also spoke to him in clear terms. He told Abraham explicitly what He was going to do.

Nor is it easy to forget God's saving grace when once we have received it; but it is quite easy to lose again the vision of God's eternal purpose. We experience no difficulty at all in losing sight of what God wants us to do! Just a little overwork-indeed we might say, just a little extra work for God is all too capable of diverting our eyes from that ultimate vision. That is why God not only appeared again to Abraham but also spoke to him again. Praise Him, He often does that!

For Abraham had seen the vision and, however belatedly, had obeyed the call. God was determined now that he should not lose sight of the hope of His calling. Therefore at Shechem He appeared to him for the second time, and spoke to him once more. And the message was brief and to the point. 'Unto thy seed will I give this land.'

The promise was for the land. For the earth had been lost; that was the problem. Right down to our day, 'the whole world lieth in the evil one' (1 John 5. 19). Now God had begun His movement to deal with this problem. He was claiming first of all a land wherein to fulfil His will. Secondly, in that land He wanted a people, for a witness.

Witness is not the dissemination of what is already general knowledge. We do not witness to what everybody already knows, but to what only a few know of the truth. This is the meaning of witness, and because of conditions generally in the then world, God wanted within it a witness-a land and a people of His own. Afterwards, through them, He would bring the good tidings of His sovereign rule to the whole earth and all the nations.

It is when we see Abraham's call that we see something of the Church's responsibility, for we are Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise (Galatians 3. 29). Our commission is the same as his. Unclouded fellowship and faithful preaching and beautiful Christian lives are not enough. There must be witness. The Church is a golden candlestick, not an ornamental vase. Nor is it enough that it should be of gold; it must be a candlestick. The light of God must shine forth from it.

In Canaan Abraham went through three tests and he built three altars. As we have seen, the first altar was in Shechem (Genesis 12.7) and the second at Bethel (12.8; 13.4). Then he went south to Egypt, fell into sin, and at length returned again to Bethel.

The third altar he built was at Hebron (13. 18). These are the three special points of Canaan in God's eyes. Each was sanctified by an altar. What they are, Canaan is. God has no use for a place where there is no altar. 'I will give you this land Shechem, Bethel, Hebron.' They are Canaan. Let us look at them now more closely.

The name Shechem, we have said, means a shoulder. It is the place of greatest strength, for that is the meaning of 'shoulder' in Hebrew. Canaan is not only a land of plenty and of milk-and-honey sweetness; it is the place of God's own strength, the place of victory, where enemies are cast out and kept out. Its strength is a living strength. The well of Sychar is in Shechem, the type of the power of the living Christ in His people. The Lord's own life is manifest there, and none go away empty. 'Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life' (John 4. 14). Those who are always empty, always thirsty, always seeking for this or that, never satisfied, are weak, and of little use to God. It is the satisfied who are strong, and God has made provision that we should all be satisfied. He offers us such satisfaction in His Son that we are able to say, 'I want nothing, I need nothing for myself.' That is strength. Is it not true that our greatest weakness as Christians arises from within, because we are unsatisfied, or dissatisfied? Shechem and the land of Canaan imply satisfaction, full and complete, and that means strength. Neither the world nor the powers of darkness can find an entry there.

Moreh, we have said, means knowledge. Knowledge is the fruit of strength. For Moreh was the name of an oak tree or terebinth in Shechem, and a tree grows out of the earth upon which it stands. Knowledge comes from, and is the fruit of, strength and satisfaction, not of doctrine. The weakness of today's knowledge is that it is mere information. Without the strength of the Lord satisfying us and producing knowledge, we have no knowledge at all. The vessel God wants for His work is not prepared by hearing a lot of things, but by seeing and receiving and being satisfied. Its understanding is based on the life of Christ within, not on information about Him. We must beware of just passing on to others what we hear. No matter how precious or profound the teaching may be, we are not to be disseminators of information. In this respect people with good memories can be most dangerous. To prattle on about divine things will achieve nothing, and may take us far from the will of God. God's power on earth cannot be maintained by what we hear but only by our knowledge of Him. What must characterize the Christian Church is what we know within us. God deliver us from a merely intellectual Gospel!

Why was Bethel necessary as well as Shechem? Because in spite of Shechem, in spite of their knowledge of life in Christ and their satisfaction with that life, men are still independent and individualistic. And God does not want a heap but a house. God is a God of order, and in God's purpose there must be the order of the Body of Christ. Christ as a Son must be over His house, whose house are we (Hebrews 3. 6).

There is much in the world that goes by the name of the house of God. The great historic Churches and denominations all claim that title. We would all agree that the Roman Catholic Church is a false house, based on a wrong principle of authority and built largely of dead bricks and not of living stones. The Protestant Church, in as far as it is evangelical, has more life. In it are many living stones, but they are individual and not united. Liberty of conscience is its speciality. There is much splendid material, but it is not built into a house.

But quietly, in many places and largely unseen, God is raising up a vessel which is truly His house. It consists not of single outstanding individuals, whether great in preaching or revival or anything else, but in humble men and women who have been welded into one by the Cross. Shechem must become Bethel. God must deliver us from the whole principle of individualism. He must save us from wanting to be outstanding individual Christians, and somehow make us one in His house. For it is the house of God that is His witness in the earth. Everyone knows how difficult it is for Christians to live together! When by the grace of God it happens, and continues to happen, even hell takes notice.

But let us be careful. Is God's house a principle to be followed, or a life to be lived? Is it something to copy, or something to be? It would be easy, having seen the value of life together, to determine at all costs to apply the principles by which it should work. But this would not achieve the result. We must have the life of the Body, the shared life of Christ that comes from Him as Head, before we can abide by its principles. They cannot just be learned.

Then how is this shared life attained? Our tent must be pitched, as we have seen already, between Ai and Bethel, between the heap and the house. On the one hand there is the house of God, the testimony to God's authority and rule in the earth. On the other hand there is the heap of ruins, the ruin of our hopes and our ambitions, our expectations and our self-esteem. Only if our back is to this are we facing that. This is both a geographical and a spiritual fact. Only if we have accepted God's judgment upon the old creation as final are we facing towards what is represented by Bethel. When our flesh, our natural strength, has been dealt with, then, and only then, do we fit into God's house naturally and without effort. We are as living stones, just the right size and shape for the place He has for us. Otherwise, however much we try to fit ourselves in, we just belong on the heap.

Many of us, alas, have little idea of what it means to have our natural strength judged and dealt with. Rather do we boast about it. 'I feel this.' 'I look at it that way.' 'In my humble opinion . . .' Secretly we glory in our opinions and in our difference from and independence of others, and we never really recognize this as outright defeat. Those who have not seen themselves by nature judged and cast upon that heap of ruins have not found their place in the Church, nor heard the voice of God there. May God have mercy on us when we dare to think that the Church of God is wrong and we are right. It is not just His people that we are repudiating in doing so, but God Himself, who pleases to reveal Himself among them.

Oh, you say, all this talk about our old nature being dealt with at the Cross of Christ is excellent, but it is rather negative. Now tell us the positive side! Let me reply quite simply that the positive side is just a matter of life-spontaneous, miraculous life. The child who is born does not have to worry where his life comes from; he just lives it quite naturally. The believer who is born again does not have to puzzle out how his new life works. It comes from Christ, he has it, he rejoices in it, and quite naturally and spontaneously he lives it. And the believer who has seen that the life of Christ is a shared life of which all His own partake-he is in just the same position. He accepts the fact and thanks God, and the life flows. There is an altar at Bethel, and God receives what is offered, namely, our acceptance of Christ as our shared life. We may in our folly depart into Egypt, but God will bring us back there.

The principles of life together will follow. Abraham moved on to Hebron, and there built his third altar. Hebron means 'a league'. In New Testament terms we could substitute the word 'fellowship', and certainly it is in fellowship together that the fact of the shared life of Christians is put to the proof. Bethel represents the life in the Body of Christ; Hebron represents the principle of living that life. The first must precede the second, and there is no way of getting to Hebron but through Bethel. You cannot take a group of men and put God's principles of fellowship into it. Fellowship in Christ is a quite natural, effortless thing because it stems from the fact of the living Body of Christ, and there is therefore no need to plan or organize it. It flows spontaneously when our hearts are, as was Abraham's, 'unto the Lord'.

It is a matter of experience that we cannot go on indefinitely, nor can we witness effectively, without fellowship. God often brings the most spiritually mature people up against a blank wall in order to teach them this. They reach an impasse, something they cannot deal with alone. Then they discover the absolute necessity of fellowship with others in Christ, and learn the practical values of the corporate life.

But when once this is known there is a new fruitfulness. At Hebron Abraham dwelt by the terebinths of Mamre. Mamre means 'firmness' or 'vigour'. When, like Abraham, the people of God are firmly established here, then indeed they have a witness. The events that immediately follow show how mighty was Abraham's witness to the world once he had come to Hebron.

The linking factor in these three places is Abraham's 'altar unto the Lord'. At the altar, in principle, God accepts only Christ. We, in making our own 'living sacrifice' (Romans 12.1), affirm that we accept Christ for ourselves, and accordingly God can receive us in Him. Because we have each abandoned any expectation in our self, and are looking to His Son Jesus Christ for everything, God accepts completely what we offer. Upon that basis, together we witness.

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