

Devotional Thoughts :: Abraham, My Friend_11

Abraham, My Friend_11 - posted by philologos (), on: 2004/2/12 5:24

Abraham, My Friend
The Making of a Praying Man

Chapter Two: The Blessing
Face to face

I'm still thinking about The Blessing. I have been trying to define blessing by subtraction. In other words, what is the essence of blessing? This is how I have been thinking. I am blessed, what would I need to lose before I could no longer say I am blessed? I have my food and shelter; would I still be blessed if these were taken away? Yes, I would. I have my wife and family; would I still be blessed if these were taken away? Yes, I would. I have a revelation of His truth and a work to do; if these were taken away would I still be blessed? Yes, I would. What if God were to be taken away? Would I still be blessed? No, I would not.

It seems to me that the essence of blessing is the presence of God. Moses certainly thought so. Moses had pleaded with God and Israel had been spared. God repeated His promise to Moses. He would give them the land He had promised, He would send an angel in front of them to drive out the enemy, He would cause them to inherit a land that flowed with milk and honey. and then God "dropped the bombshell". "I will not go up in the midst of thee; for thou art a stiffnecked people..." God repeats all his promises to them and then adds but I'm not coming with you. What an astonishing statement. Apparently, you can have promises fulfilled, receive an inheritance by faith, know constant victory in all your conflicts, live a life full of every provision... and not have God with you. This is a sobering concept. We live in an age when some Christian groups can "guarantee" all these blessings, and see their acquisition as absolute "proof" that what they say is God's truth. But here is a terrible prospect; you can have all these things and be without God's presence.

God effectively disowned Israel at this point; the LORD said unto Moses, Depart, and go up hence, thou and the people which thou hast brought up out of the land of Egypt. Not "My people, Israel" but the people which thou hast brought up out of the land of Egypt.

The people of Israel were devastated by this information; they acted out their mourning, stripping off their ornaments. They were a people bereaved; potentially, they had lost God. They watched with bated breath as Moses stepped into the privacy of a temporary tabernacle and sought the LORD; the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend. (Not only Abraham, but Moses too, was God's Friend.) Moses pleads with his Friend; Moses has nothing to set before the people of Israel, but he pleads for God to be gracious. His prayer is wonderful. He pleads with God to be gracious because he has no other basis for his plea. And his final plea is Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation is thy people. His final plea in this prayer is LORD, recognise Israel again as your own people.

His petition is granted; My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest. Literally, My face shall accompany thee. This is a Hebrew idiom; the face, *paniyim*, means the presence. The word is used over 2000 times in the Hebrew Bible; usually in our translation it is translated "before" meaning "in the presence of". It is a powerful picture that runs through the Bible and through many cultures. "we really see eye to eye", "he wouldn't look me in the face", "the LORD talked to Moses face to face, (*paniyim* to *paniyim*) as a man speaketh unto a friend". It has to do with eye-contact; people comfortable in each other's company. This was the purpose of the central ritual of Israel's priesthood, the Day of Atonement. Its purpose was to make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before (*paniyim*) the LORD. It was to ensure that sin was put away so that God would remain "present" with His people.

Moses' wonderful petition is granted; the LORD will keep His tabernacle in the midst of theirs; He will keep His face towards them. But to me, it is Moses' reply that sets him apart as a man of great insight and personal devotion to God. We need to remember that this is a friend talking to a Friend. He says, If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up h

ence. For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? is it not in that thou goest with us? so shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth. Moses says, in effect, if You are not coming with us leave us here, nothing else matters. There is no arrogance or disrespect here but he is speaking, as a man does to his friend, Moses says 'who cares about the promised land? Who cares about victory and wealth and health?' And then he makes this amazing statement that the thing which distinguishes Israel as God's people is not any by-product blessings. ? so shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth. The thing which distinguishes them as God's people, as being different to all others, is God's presence. This is God's authentic signature on His own; His presence.

The greater the experience, the greater the danger of reliance upon it. Israel had had some amazing experiences. They had been through flood and fire. They had seen God move on their behalf in great power. They had sealed the covenant. And yet if Moses is right, the thing which sets them apart is not their history but their present. Their distinctiveness, as the people of God, depended not only upon their historical experience but on their 'present tense' relationship with God.

Let's keep all this in mind as we return to the Blessing. Against the history of this close-run-thing where God almost disowned them comes the Levitical law with its offerings and sacrifices for sin. In Numbers, Israel is poised to start an eleven day journey to the promised land. They are God's people but need the continuance of His presence; this alone identifies them as God's own nation. So the priests are entrusted with the Triune Blessing of Numbers 6:22-27

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, In this way you shall bless the sons of Israel, saying to them:

The LORD bless you and keep you;

The LORD cause His face (paniym) to shine on you, and be gracious to you;

The LORD lift up His face (paniym) to you, and give you peace.

So they shall put My name on the sons of Israel, and I Myself will bless them.

This is a prayer for the continued presence of God among His people. It is the same prayer for grace and peace which is repeated at the beginning of every single letter of Paul and Peter in the New Testament. Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. All the other blessings can wait, God-consciousness is the foundation for all, or the building will become a magnificent ruin. There is no prayer for fruitfulness, or victory, or glory here; just a prayer for God's presence. There have been many definitions of revival; how about this one? God is here, among his people. At one of the annual conventions of the early Methodists the delegates had been sharing the victories of the cross throughout the land. It was a time of great blessing, but John Wesley put it all into perspective when he said "and best of all, God is with us".

Now think about the final promise in Numbers 6:27; So they shall put My name on the sons of Israel, and I Myself will bless them. Did you ever have something which was precious to you? Did you put your name on it to tell all the world that it was yours? This is how the priests of old were to put God's name on the sons of Israel, by invoking His presence. He blessed them with His presence and that was The Blessing. God puts His seal/signature on His people. Grace and peace is His signature; it says 'this is mine'. But then grace and peace are not detachable; they are the consequence of His presence, by His Spirit. And ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God doth dwell in you; and if any one hath not the Spirit of Christ—this one is not His;

What are we seeking? Blessing? Provision? Revival? That was a wise man who testified; When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek.

My goal is God Himself, not joy, nor peace;

Nor even blessing, but Himself, my God.

'Tis His to lead me there, not mine but His...

At any cost, dear Lord, by any road.

So faith bounds forward to its goal in God,
and love can trust her Lord to lead her there.

Upheld by Him, my soul is foll'wing hard,

Till God hath full fulfilled my deepest prayer.

No matter if the way be sometimes dark,
No matter though the cost be oft-times great,
He knoweth how I best shall reach the mark,
The way that leads to Him must needs be straight.

One thing I know, I cannot say Him nay;
One thing I do, I press on towards my Lord.
My God, my Glory here from day to day,
And in the glory there, my Great Reward.

Re: Abraham, My Friend_11 - posted by Clutch (), on: 2004/2/12 6:14

Hi Ron,
I like these threads where we can agree much better.

" We live in an age when some Christian groups can Â'guaranteeÂ' all these blessings, and see their acquisition as absolute Â'proofÂ' that what they say is GodÂ's truth. But here is a terrible prospect; you can have all these things and be without GodÂ's presence."

Agreed! You old bird watcher you. :-D

Clutch :-P

Re: Abraham, My Friend_11 - posted by Delboy (), on: 2004/2/12 12:21

Quote:
-----we live in an age when some christian groups can 'guaentee' all these blessings

praise God for this devotional,thanks,
can i ask you Ron, under the new covenant are'nt these blessings assured us His presence and subsequent blessings.C
an these blessings be applied to us now? :-)

Quote:

looking ahead & up
Delboy

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2004/2/12 23:32

Delboy
I am out of town for the weekend. I will give this some attention when I return. In the meantime others may have some comments. This forum section is not my private hunting ground. :-P

Re: Abraham, My Friend_11 - posted by crsschk (), on: 2004/2/15 9:13

Quote:
-----What if God were to be taken away? Would I still be blessed? No, I would not.

From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.

Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?

*Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.
And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.*

Joh 6:66-69

I really need to expand my vocabulary Ron, this is the best I can do:

YES!

All of this, yes!

The ties that can run through so many things...

This morning I was letting my imagination run wild and was pondering what if a preacher got up and instead of a benediction at the beginning he prayed;

"Lord, take away Your Presence from us"?

By that I mean even the 'common grace' that we all are so relaxed in. (Interesting that it came up somewhat in the Tozer devotional today as well)

Would it not be a foretaste of the worst possible outcome that any soul could bear? Is that not hell itself? What our Lord went through on the cross? Would that get the congregations attention?

The unbeliever's?

Just some musings...

Quote:

-----My goal is God Himself, not joy, nor peace;

I believe you have alluded to this before, but isn't it a beautiful quagmire that if you have God Himself you have both?! "*.. and all these things shall be added unto you*"

Re: - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2004/2/15 17:54

Quote:

-----Moses' wonderful petition is granted; the LORD will keep His tabernacle in the midst of theirs; He will keep His face towards them. But to me, it is Moses' reply that sets him apart as a man of great insight and personal devotion to God. We need to remember that this is a friend talking to a Friend.

Moses lived near God, and had the freest and most unhindered and boldest access to God, but this, instead of abating the necessity of prayer, made it more necessary, obvious and powerful. Familiarity and closeness to God gives relish, frequency, point and potency to prayer. Those who know God the best are the richest and most powerful in prayer. Little acquaintance with God, and strangeness and coldness to Him, make prayer a rare and feeble thing.

-E.M. Bounds (*taken from: Prayer and Praying Men*).