

Devotional Thoughts :: Abraham, My Friend_15

Abraham, My Friend_15 - posted by philologos (), on: 2004/3/11 9:43

Abraham, My Friend
The Making of a Praying Man

Chapter Three: Entering the land
Still callingÂ...

LetÂ's linger a while on this theme of calling on the name of the Lord. Do you call on the name of the Lord? Notice, I didn't ask 'did you' but 'do you'. We'll take a look at this as the ongoing process rather than an initial crisis. Perhaps a word or two first about that 'crisis'. We all do come to a crisis and it is important that we do. It is a key work of God's Spirit to bring us to points of deliberate choice. Choose ye, this day, whom ye will serve. How different this demand is to most 'altar calls'. Mostly, the 'altar call' is focussed on sins forgiven, or heaven, or peace. The Bible's emphasis is quite different; whom will you serve. It is instructive to read Ananias' counsel to Paul. This is no 'sinner's prayer' but 'And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord. There's that phrase again 'Calling upon the Name of the Lord'. At the risk of boring you, I repeat that this is not 'saying a prayer'; that can be a very cerebral activity. There is an urgency, a passion in 'calling on the name of the Lord' that is not necessarily present in someone who 'prays a prayer'. Something inside the man must reach out to God.

Let me illustrate what I mean from the Exodus story... And it came to pass in process of time, that the king of Egypt died: and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. Are we 'sighing' or 'crying'? In our prayer for God to move in our communities are we 'sighing' or 'crying'? There is a strong temptation to 'sighing' as we grow older; "ah, I remember when..." There is no energy in 'sighing', no passion; it is fundamentally a complaint. Is it reading too much into the verse to say that God ignored their sighing but responded to their crying? I see that He responded to their 'groaning' too. (notice that was 'groaning', not 'moaning'!). Their condition had deteriorated generation by generation, and no doubt there were those who said 'it wasn't like this when I was a girl/boy.' A sigh is passive and involuntary; a cry is active and deliberate. Salvation is not the result of passive consent but of active 'calling on the name of the Lord'. Its basis is not the passive 'receiving Jesus Christ as your Lord' but the desperate reaching out from inevitable destruction to the only possible deliverer. It comes, not as a result of explanation and persuasion but as a result of revelation. Wake up, stir yourself! God hears a 'cry'.

We shall see Abraham returning to the point of his crisis in a latter chapter, but I want to move from crisis to process. I wonder how you describe 'Christians'? There is an interesting description in the book of Acts; it is found on the lips of friend and foe. This is Ananias expressing his anxiety over Paul's conversion; And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. And this is the local synagogue congregation; But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? They both describe 'Christians' as people who call on the Name. Ah, you say, that is just to distinguish them from the Jews. I wonder?

Paul's First Corinthians is addressed to the church in that city but not exclusively so. It is one of the few places where Paul's words show that he knew his letters were not just for a particular locality. Certainly, it is addressed to those 'called saints' at Corinth but he adds another group to his greeting; with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both their and ours: Did you know that if you are one of those that 'calls upon the name of Jesus Christ' this letter was addressed to you? Some expositors have concluded that some of the things Paul says in this letter were only for the Corinthians, but Paul knew from the beginning that others would be reading this letter; he addressed it to them. This letter is addressed to those that 'call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord' in Canada, the USA, Australia, Java, Bolivia, the UK. Put your own town in the verse; this was written for you... if you call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Most of the references to 'calling upon the name of the Lord' do have a focus on the crisis, but this verse brings out another truth. The verb used for 'call' is in a special form. For those who are interested, it is a present participle preceded by a definite article. (I bet that was a blessing!) Seriously, it is the way Greek shows not just an event but a characteristic. This letter is addressed to 'the ones calling upon the name of the Jesus Christ our Lord'. This is not just something they once did, but a description of their continual behaviour. Let me illustrate. I once won a bronze medal for old-time dancing! But no one who knows me would ever think of me as Ron the Dancer. It was an event, it never became part of my life; I haven't danced now for 50 years. First Corinthians is not written to people who 'called upon the name of the Jesus Christ our Lord' 50 years ago; it is written to people who are still 'calling upon the Name'. Are you one of those? Am I? Is Christianity an event or a way of life?

And this isn't the only time we find this emphasis; Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. This is the same grammatical construction. Even when God has made our hearts 'pure' the need remains the same; we are still to be those whose whole life is characterised by the fact that they are continually 'calling on the Lord'. And again; And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear: Is there no end to this? Am I to spend my whole pilgrimage 'calling upon the name of the Lord'?

The writer to the Hebrews brings the same truth from another perspective; Wherefore also he is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. This time the characteristic behaviour is not 'calling upon the Lord' but 'drawing near unto God through Him'. Is He able? That is the question; not do I believe in sanctification. Do I believe that 'as I continually draw near to God through Christ' He is able to save to the uttermost?

There is an interesting illustration of the way this works in Paul's decision to 'appeal to Caesar'. For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar. This is exactly the same word that we have been following. A literal translation would be 'I call upon Caesar'. It is wonderful to trace the effect of this 'calling upon Caesar'. It had seemed that Paul's life was at the mercy of the mob, the Sanhedrin, the Procurator Festus, King Agrippa. From the moment of this 'calling upon Caesar' the whole might of the Roman Empire was marshalled to get him to Rome. No one else had any right to judge him or decide his fate; 'calling upon Caesar' had brought him under the personal jurisdiction of the Emperor. This is our confidence too; our continually 'calling upon the name of the Lord' is not a magic spell but it does keep us constantly under the jurisdiction of the Name. It is the absolute guarantee that we shall not fall into the hands of man or demon. Without His express permission they dare not interfere; all the might of the Empire is marshalled on our behalf. Makes you feel safe, doesn't it?

Re: Abraham, My Friend_15 - posted by truth_seeker, on: 2004/3/11 13:55

wow. Everything in this teaching is what I've been asking myself lately. To "go after God" or to "seek His face" or whatever phrase people want to use, it's making sense. To call upon God is to put yourself in a vulnerable state so that God sees your rags of humanity and looks past them to see the cry coming from your lips. It's not how you pray, is it? It's what your soul is saying to God. Calling on God is admitting that you don't have it all together and admitting that your righteousness is nothing compared to His holiness and just letting that void inside of you come out however your soul feels is appropriate... isn't it? Man, God's doing something isn't He??

quote:

Salvation is not the result of passive consent but of active 'calling on the name of the Lord'. Its basis is not the passive 'receiving Jesus Christ as your Lord' but the desperate reaching out from inevitable destruction to the only possible deliverer. It comes, not as a result of explanation and persuasion but as a result of revelation. Wake up, stir yourself! God hears a 'cry'.

Let's go for it!

Stirring,
Michelle

Re: - posted by crsschk (), on: 2004/3/13 11:40

This jumped out and grabbed me:

Quote:

-----to see the cry coming from your lips. It's not how you pray, is it?

No, it's not...

Quote:

It's what your soul is saying to God. Calling on God is admitting that you don't have it all together and admitting that your righteousness is nothing compared to His holiness and just letting that void inside of you come out however your soul feels is appropriate... isn't it?

Yes it is!

It is so good to know that we are not alone in our heart cries...
The Psalms, The Psalms, The Psalms!

Quote:

-----Man, God's doing something isn't He??

Yes!

Sorry, I haven't even read all of Ron's most recent installment of this excellent unfolding of the life of Abraham. But I had just had to respond to this. Bless you, Michelle

Stirred, struck and straining to lay hold of...

Psalm 143

Hear my prayer, O LORD, give ear to my supplications: in thy faithfulness answer me, and in thy righteousness.

And enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.

For the enemy hath persecuted my soul; he hath smitten my life down to the ground; he hath made me to dwell in darkness, as those that have been long dead.

Therefore is my spirit overwhelmed within me; my heart within me is desolate.

I remember the days of old; I meditate on all thy works; I muse on the work of thy hands.

I stretch forth my hands unto thee: my soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land. Selah.

Hear me speedily, O LORD: my spirit faileth: hide not thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit.

Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee.

Deliver me, O LORD, from mine enemies: I flee unto thee to hide me.

Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness.

Quicken me, O LORD, for thy name's sake: for thy righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble.

And of thy mercy cut off mine enemies, and destroy all them that afflict my soul: for I am thy servant.

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2004/3/13 15:09

Mike quoted Michelle This jumped out and grabbed me:

Quote:

to see the cry coming from your lips. It's not how you pray, is it?

No, it's not...

Let me add, my 'no, it's not'.

Did you ever notice that the disciples never asked the Lord 'how' to pray; And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples. Luke 11:1

That was their cry and it is still mine. I'm not interested in techniques. I don't want to know 'how to pray'. I just want the Lord continually to 'teach us to pray'