

## Devotional Thoughts :: Abraham, My Friend\_45

**Abraham, My Friend\_45 - posted by philologos (), on: 2004/11/16 6:42**

Abraham, My Friend  
The Making of a Praying Man\_45

Beware the Bildads

Iâ'm going give a little time to meditation on this issue of Godâ's Justice.

For generations atheists have said it is not possible for God to be all loving, all knowing and all powerful at the same time. Two out of three they say are possible but not three out of three. Pause a moment before you read on to think this through. Is it a legitimate objection? You can see the different permutations. Their reasoning is thus; God might know all and have all power, but if so then He plainly doesn't care. Or they say; God might have all power and be all loving, but if so then there are plainly some situations He doesn't know about. See the pattern? Why not work out the last permutation for yourself?

At this point in the history of Abraham, the Friend of God, Abraham is posing the same question in his own way. **And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?** (Gen 18:23 KJV) Our English versions obscure the fact that both 'the righteous' and 'the wicked' are singular. Abraham is not just speaking of 'the righteous' as a class but 'the righteous (man)' i.e. 'the individual'. Abraham is asking 'Do you not distinguish between a righteous man and a wicked man?' Behind it all the child's plaintive cry 'it's not fair'. Without going into philosophy let just say that the notion that things should be 'fair' is a powerful statement that man is not an evolved animal. He has, innately, a sense of justice. He may try to manipulate 'justice' for his own ends but underlying even his manipulation is the need to 'justify' his action. Why should a man need to justify himself unless he has a moral dimension that cannot be explained. The child has a sense of 'fair' long before he has been shaped by his culture.

It is important to understand that Abraham is not staging a protest here. Follow the movement as this passage is introduced; **And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the LORD. And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?** (Gen 18:22-23 KJV) As the angel watchers start their journey towards Sodom Abraham 'stood yet before Jehovah'. This is the man waiting upon his guest, who is also his Lord. As any faithful 'waiter' his does not impose his presence upon his Lord; he waits at his side, inconspicuously. When the watchers leave however Abraham changes his position; **Abraham drew near.** Ah, what a wealth there is in this simple phrase. Prayer, is drawing near. Abraham is not standing at a distance hurling accusations against God; **Abraham drew near.**

There is way of praying that sees a man rushing into the presence of God with his shopping list, but that is not Abraham's way. There is a kind of arrow-prayer which the endangered cry instinctively; Lord, save me. But this is the kind of prayer that is the way of the man who is a Friend of God.; he draws near. This is word used to describe the closeness of father and son; **And Isaac said unto Jacob, Come near, I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my son, whether thou be my very son Esau or not.** (Gen 27:21 KJV) Jacob is near enough to be embraced here; the phrase is used several times in the story of Isaac and Jacob. Close enough to smell, close enough to touch; close enough to hear the gentlest whispers; **Abraham drew near.** The wonderful account of grandfather Israel with Ephraim and Manasseh uses the word to o; **Now the eyes of Israel were dim for age, so that he could not see. And he brought them near unto him; and he kissed them, and embraced them.** (Gen 48:10 KJV). Near enough to embrace, near enough to kiss; **Abraham drew near.** It is used of the most intimate nearness of all; **And he said unto the people, Be ready against the third day: come not near a woman.** (Exo 19:15 ASV)

I am emphasising this to make it clear that Abraham is not about to launch into a bargaining session with the seller. This is prayer based on intimate relationship. I wonder what image you have of Abraham here? Do you see him aggressively beating down an opponent in the market place? I have an image of Abraham by his Lord's side. The Lord's arm is around Abraham's shoulder and Abraham looks up into the face of the Lord who is his friend, and ask his question. There are no un-askable questions when God's arm is around your shoulders. Some people demand answers from Go

d and get none, and to them it proves His non-existence. Abraham has 'drawn nigh' and he will prove the eternal truth of James; **Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you**... (Jam 4:7-8a KJV)

So now, having drawn near, Abraham can ask his question; **And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous (one) with the wicked (one)?** (Gen 18:23 KJV) Abraham has revelation behind this question. God has said nothing about 'destruction' but Abraham knows that there is a pattern of crime and punishment, or at least, sin and retribution. Behind the apparent chaos of 'random' destruction Abraham knows there is a truth which must make sense. He also knows the essence of God's character; **That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous (one) with the wicked (one), that so the righteous (one) should be as the wicked (one); that be far from thee: shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?** (Gen 18:25 ASV) There is a whole theology of justice here; where did Abraham get it from? This is sound theology, but we have to be very cautious in the way that we apply it.

About 400 years after this a theologian tried to apply it to Job, disastrously. **Then answered Bildad the Shuhite, and said, How long wilt thou speak these things? And how long shall the words of thy mouth be like a mighty wind? Doth God pervert justice? Or doth the Almighty pervert righteousness?** (Job 8:1-3 ASV) This is where the danger always lies for Christians too; the temptation to apply general truth to specific cases. Bildad had the same convictions as Abraham; he knew that God does distinguish between the righteous man and the wicked man. He knew too that judgement is part of the way that God works, but it was when he applied it the specific case of Job that he went astray. He was a good theologian but a hopeless pastor. Bildad's single step theology produces this diagnosis of the case;

1. God judges wicked men and they suffer.
2. Job is suffering.
3. Therefore Job is a wicked man.

God has a word for such theologians; **Who is this that darkeneth counsel By words without knowledge?** (Job 38:2 ASV) I visited Kiev in the Ukraine a couple of years after the Chernobyl disaster. Many were living in constant fear of the consequences of radiation. I met up with a visitor to the Ukraine who was a self-styled prayer warrior. He explained to the gathered saints that he and others had been praying for God's judgement upon Communism. I recall his words "we have been praying for hammer blows to fall on this godless nation" he said "and Chernobyl is just the first". There are very few men who are authorised by God to say "this is God's judgement"; the remainder are Bildads!

All suffering in our world is the consequence of sin. That is a general statement and, I trust, a true one. However, I must be extremely circumspect in the way that I map any one particular sin to any one particular suffering. In computer jargon, these are not one to one relationships. It is very tempting to say that Auschwitz or Chernobyl or 9-11 is God's punishment, but we must resist the temptation. **There were present at that season some that told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.** (Luk 13:1-5 KJV) The Bildads, of course, always have the answers and know exactly why the Galileans had 'suffered such things' and why a falling tower had killed 18 people. This is direct intervention, they say, this is God's specific judgement. Not so, says Jesus.

The disciples of Jesus had obviously been under the influence of the Bildads. **And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents, but that the works of God should be made manifest in him I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day. The night cometh, when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.** (Joh 9:1-5 KJV with altered RB punctuation!) They want an answer to their question in terms of a simple one-to-one relationship. 'Who is to blame for this man's blindness?' is the underlying question. They then produce a short-list of the usual suspects; this man or his parents? 'Neither' says Jesus. The Lord is saying, in this specific case, there is no immediate connection between a particular sin and this man's particular suffering. It takes a brave man, a fool, or a Bildad, to say 'this is the cause of that'. Or it takes a specific revelation from God; this would be an almost unique revelation in our present day. It is not impossible but it is very unlikely.

Abraham's question 'perhaps there be fifty righteous within the city' receives God's assurance that, in this instance, fifty righteous would enable Him to spare the city. Again, please note the way I am expressing things. This is not a rel

uctant God being persuaded against His will. God's choice will always be to 'spare' whenever possible. Perhaps His answer surprised Abraham and he pursues his question but we see the same humble attitude throughout this conversation; 'I am but dust and ashes' v27, 'Lord, be not angry' v30, etc. Abraham's prayer has been the opportunity for God's mercy to be seen. God is not capricious nor does He work in arbitrary manners but there is a 'justice' behind His dealings.

For those who regard prayer as a means of getting something from God, Abraham's prayer is a total failure. But for those who see prayer as a means of providing something for God upon which He has chosen to base His actions, this is a wonderful success.

When the point is thoroughly made, it is God who terminates this encounter. It was not that Abraham lost focus or was not sufficiently determined; **And the LORD went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place.** (Gen 18:33 KJV) This was not a contest and there are no winners or losers. This was a 'communing'. It was not when 'Abraham left communing' but **'when He had left communing with Abraham'**. It's a wise man who knows when to pray; perhaps it's a wiser one who knows when to stop. It is not wrong to 'draw near' with the questions that perplex, but it is wisdom to understand that simple questions don't always have simple answers.

**Re: Abraham, My Friend\_45 - posted by Nasher (), on: 2004/11/16 8:36**

Thank you Ron, this was great.

**Re: Abraham, My Friend\_45 - posted by RobertW (), on: 2004/11/16 10:18**

Quote:  
-----t is not wrong to 'draw near' with the questions that perplex, but it is wisdom to understand that simple questions don't always have simple answers.  
-----

Great lesson today. Good to help us all stay in balance with the whole judgment of God thing. I was thinking about the whole Holocaust, Chernobyl, 9-11 thing. I can't really speak to the Jews or the Russians in this regard. Here in America, though, there is so much sin in so much light that it seems that God has from time to time "lifted His hand off" of this nation and allowed our enemies to do what He had previously restrained them from doing. It is not something I could really defend biblically because the mysteries of God are too wonderful for me. It is like spiritual quantum algebra to understand what God is doing. My Pastor once said, if God were to explain what He was doing and why He allowed things to happen here, but not there, we wouldn't understand it anyway. He ways are too far beyond us to grasp some of the wonders of God's wisdom. They are past finding out. They are too wonderful for me. That is why, when we don't understand we have to trust Him that He knows what He is doing.

There used to be a tale that was told in my family that a godly woman of great prayer prayed for God to revive her dying infant child. She pressed God and pressed God in prayer. It is said that she told God it was unacceptable that her innocent baby should die. As the tale is told the child revived and grew up to be an impenitent sinner and died that way. I question the theology of this tale; but I don't question the meaning. God always knows best.

I believe the place to begin when we speak of catastrophe and pain and suffering must be Lamentations 3:22; It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. We all deserve wrath because we are all sinners. Any good thing I have comes down from above. My next breath is the mercy of God. If He chooses to withhold that mercy, it is His prerogative. I can only echo the words of father Abraham, will not the judge of all the earth do right?. And as you so eloquently stated it, with His arm wrapped around, we can find refuge in His love motivated wisdom, that desires that none perish, but all come to repentance. That He makes all things work together for our good. That, perhaps someday, with our glorified mind, we will see His wisdom and marvel, and praise and worship Him for WHO HE IS throughout the eons of ages.

God Bless,

-Robert

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2004/11/16 10:58

Quote:  
-----I believe the place to begin when we speak of catastrophe and pain and suffering must be Lamentations 3:22; It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. We all deserve wrath because we are all sinners.  
-----

Amen, my brother.