

Devotional Thoughts :: Abraham, My Friend_17

Abraham, My Friend_17 - posted by philologos (), on: 2004/3/25 3:36

Abraham, My Friend,

Chapter 4: Down into Egypt
What is this that thou hast done?

Beware the temptation to take a quick, reasonable, sojourn in Egypt until the difficult times pass. "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths." This is how we ended our last devotional meditation. Abraham was on course for Egypt. Have you noticed how the Bible sometimes records events without any moral commentary? Christian's have spirited discussions about the split between Paul and Barnabas; usually deciding in favour of the man whose character best fits their own. The Bible, however, refuses to point a finger or even apportion guilt. We need to be aware of this as we read the scriptures. And sometimes it doesn't need to tell us whether it is right or wrong; we should already know.

It is alarming to see how easy it is to take a second step into compromise once you have taken the first. There is no such thing as a small sin, or a small compromise. Having made his decision Abraham pauses on the border of Egypt with some thoughts for Sarah as to how he can further guarantee his survival. Afraid that his still beautiful wife will be too great a temptation to the people in Egypt he instructs her to be "economic with the truth"; she is not to admit to being his wife and must say that she is Abraham's sister. Abraham reasons that this may save his life; he seems careless of his wife's honour to say the least.

It is instructive to see how fear can cloud our judgment. Peter had been used to eating with the Gentiles: but when an influential group arrived from James, "he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision". There is a faith which works through love, and perfect love casts out all fear. How often God has caused the words "Fear Not" to be written in scripture. He only speaks to true conditions which shows that this is a continual temptation to the believer. Abraham had decided to 'sojourn in Egypt' through fear of famine conditions in 'the land'; now he puts God's plans at risk in fear for his own life.

Fear is a killer. The Lord spoke to the church at Smyrna and told them to "fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer". How different this is to the frequent counsel of well meaning Christian friends. "Cheer up" they say "it may never happen" or "everything will be alright". In contrast the Lord says "the devil shall cast some of you into prison ten days;" (Rev 2:10) How does that fit into your theology? Some would say "the Lord would never allow it". Oh, He might. Your personal survival is not the top of his list of priorities; 'though your well-being is. There are mysteries at work in God's plan which remain hidden from us. It is said of the rider of the red horse that "it was given to him to take peace from the earth," By whom was it given? When inexplicable pain comes into your life don't believe the slanderer who tells you that God doesn't care.

I am writing this sentence in Romania; many believers here have known what it is like to be 'cast into prison ten days'; their sufferings were great but so was their experience of God. And of this we may be absolutely sure that God has not abdicated His throne, or left us to the devil's wiles. There is a limit beyond which he cannot go, and which God has firmly set. There may well be days of trial but of this we are sure; that if God hath set their number, 10, there never shall be 11. Do not fear the future, don't fear 'fear'; 'fear' is a destructive force. Don't fear 'sorrow'; don't seek it; that would be masochism but don't fear it either. Sorrow can be a powerfully constructive force in the hands of God.

Abraham has taken his eyes off the goal, and the slide is on. Sarah is taken into Pharaoh's house, no doubt with the ultimate intention of becoming another wife when purification rites and times had been satisfied. We then have another verse which shows just how hard it is to stop the slide once it has begun; Pharaoh "entreated Abraham well for her sake: and he had sheep and oxen, and he asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she-asses, and camels." It is difficult to calculate just how substantial a 'bride-price' Pharaoh paid to Abraham; asses were worth a fortune in this culture and camels were more valuable still. How could Abraham have acquiesced to this? When I read the account I want to cry out, perhaps as Sarah wanted to cry out, "Abraham, For God's sake, say something!" But compromise always cl

oses the mouth of the witness; Â“be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope t hat is in you with meekness and fear: having a good conscience... Â“ It is impossible to witness with conviction when th e conscience is defiled.

In His mercy, God called a halt to this disgrace with a sovereign intervention. Not for the last time, the LORD plagued P haraoh and his house with great plagues. and, apparently, revealed to Pharaoh the cause of the trouble. Pharaoh's que stion is a haunting echo from the garden of Eden; Â“what is this that thou hast done...?Â” Eve's folly and Adam's sin ha d terrible consequences. Sometimes it is a mercy that we 'don't know what we have done' in all its full significance. Eve' s folly was an integral step to all our sorrows, and millennia of pain. Sometimes the short-term consequences seem fair ly small. After all Abraham gets away with it doesn't he? In fact he does rather well out of the episode. Pharaoh gives hi m back his wife, and extradites him from Egypt with Â“all that he hadÂ”. So nothing 'lost' and considerable 'gain'; all th ose sheep, and oxen, and he-asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she-asses, and camels. Â“And Abraham went up out of Egypt, he and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south. And Abraham was very rich i n cattle, in silver and in gold. And he went on his journeys from the south even to Beth-el, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning.Â”

So, all's well that ends well? He is back on course. But Abraham was to discover that it is easier to get his family out of Egypt than it is to get Egypt out of his family. Perhaps partly as a result of this sudden wealth, strife develops betwee n Â“the herdmen of Abraham's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattleÂ” and Abraham offers Lot the first choice as to wh ere he will be based. The basis of Lot's choice is recorded for us; Â“Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plains of Jo rdan, that it was well watered everywhere, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of th e LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar.Â” Abraham's brief excursion into Egypt has left a lasting imp ression on the mind of his nephew; he likes what he has seen. Lot will create his own little compromise world here in th e place that reminds him of Egypt; He will pitch his tent facing Sodom. Of course, he wouldn't think of 'settling' in Sodo m; not yet anyway. Abraham's compromise has reproduced itself in Lot and the consequences will be very 'long-term'. These are the first steps of Lot's slide. This is Abraham's story so we don't have the time to follow Lot, but if we did we would see his compromise and its consequences. Even when he escapes from Sodom with his life, he is still pleading t o be allowed to live in another city; Â“this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one: Oh let me escape thither, (is it not a little one?)...Â” {Gen 19:20 That is the distinctive cry of the compromiser; 'after all, it's only a little one'. Lot's compromi se reproduced itself in the morals of his daughters, and resulted in two babies; one called Moab and the other Ammon. Their descendants; the Moabites and the Ammonites would be a thorn in the side of Abraham's family for generations.

And Abraham and Sarah? They didn't do too badly did they? Well it seems as though they did 'ok', except that it does s eem very likely that one of those 'maid-servants' that Pharaoh gave to Abraham may have been named 'Hagar'. Â“Sara h... had a handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar. and that is a story which runs on to the present day, for Abr aham fathered a child by Hagar whom he called Ishmael. and Ishmael is the father of the Arab nations.

There are promises and warnings in the scriptures, and we do well to take careful note of both. It may well be that we c an speed the process of 'wealth gathering' by Egypt's methodology and in the short term it will be viewed by all as a suc cessful enterprise. Many a compromise seems to come and go unnoticed but who can measure the long term conseque nces of disobedience? There is an interesting story about Mao Tse Tung. Mao was a keen student of history and a forei gn journalist once asked him his opinion on the French Revolution. Mao was silent for a moment and then said Â“it is to o soon to say.Â” The church of Christ compromises at its own peril. It may be that today's 'gospel according to Barnum and Bailey' with all its glitz and superstars will bring quick and spectacular results, on the other hand 'it is too soon to say '.

Re: Abraham, My Friend_17 - posted by Nasher (), on: 2004/3/31 7:10

Excellent Ron, this gives me a lot to think (and act) about.

Thank you.