

Devotional Thoughts :: Abraham, My Friend_50

Abraham, My Friend_50 - posted by philologos (), on: 2004/12/21 10:04

Abraham, My Friend
The Making of a Praying Man_50

I will... and Sarah shall...

At this point in our meditations on the life of Abraham, the Friend of God, we come to a new aspect of Abraham's life. We saw his first steps of faith and he turned his back on all he had known and went out *not knowing whither*... We have watched him come to justifying faith and become the archetype of the true believer; a man utterly reliant not upon an idea but upon the person and character of God Himself. (Gen 15:6) We saw him witness a mysterious contract within the Godhead. (Gen 15:9ff) We have seen the tragedy of his failures in the stories of Hagar and Ishmael. (Gen 16) We have seen him drawn into personal covenant with God sealed in the blood of circumcision. (Gen 17) We have seen his intercession as a 'friend of God' over Sodom. (Gen 18,19) We have seen his slippage back to natural resource and God's declaration to Abimelech that Abraham was a prophet and a pray-er. We come now to the birth of Isaac and Abraham as a personal revelation of the character of God.

From this point in the story we shall find Abraham as a type of the Father. Up until now we have watched his training, now we shall see God Himself in the story of Abraham. In the scriptures there are many types of Christ; individuals and stories which prefigure Christ's person and work. As far as I can recall Abraham is the only 'type' of the Father Himself. It is appropriate that this man whose name always included the idea of Fatherhood should now set forth some of the glories of God as Father. It is appropriate too that this new era should begin with the story of a Father and a Son. Later when speaking to Abraham of Isaac God refers to 'thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest'. It will be important to remember that this is how God thinks of Isaac. It is impossible to read these words without sensing how carefully God has chosen them. For the reader sensitised by the Spirit his thoughts move from the earthly pictures to the heavenly Father and Son instinctively.

And the picture opens out here in a miracle birth. Not a virgin conception as with Mary but the Bible's first miracle baby. Sarah's incredulous laugh is the equivalent of Mary's question; how can these things be? So far, in Abraham's story Sarah has been the passive instrument, mostly. The only incident in which she took the active role was the disaster of Ishmael's birth, but it is time to see Sarah in another light. **Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. (Heb 11:11 KJV)** It was not possible for Abraham alone to see the Seed into existence; it needed Sarah also... What a wonderful scene this is; these two ancient people living out their moments in vibrant faith. There is no retirement age for faith. It is not the special field of the zealous teenager or the strong warrior in the fullness of his strength. If Sarah had not believed there would have been no Isaac.

In Romans Paul focuses on the 'faith of Abraham' **Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. (Rom 4:18-21 KJV)** This is a wonderful exposition of 'faith' and we have unpacked it earlier in our meditations. If we had only Paul's exposition we would hardly consider Sarah's part in the moment, but Hebrews does not mention the place of Abraham's faith in the birth of Isaac but concentrates entirely on Sarah. It is worth pausing a while to consider, as the writer of Hebrews evidently intended we should, the faith of Sarah.

through faith also Sarah herself... Sarah's faith did not ride piggy-back on Abraham's faith; it was 'self-standing' faith. No doubt she was encouraged by Abraham's faith, but this was Sarah's own faith not an echo of Abraham's. When the angel visitors had called Sarah was hidden in the background; in the tent. Abraham is out in the public gaze and an observer could have seen the spectacle of Abraham's faith in many ways. Sarah's faith however is not in the public domain. Hers is the faith of the kitchen and the back room; this is faith behind the veil of public view. These are

secret obediences that will never hit the headlines but which bring Isaacs into being. We marvel at Abraham's faith, and rightly so, but it will be good to draw Sarah's faith into the light for a while.

By faith even Sarah herself received power to conceive seed... (Heb 11:11a ASV) By faith, Sarah 'received power'. There is nothing passive about the verb translated 'receive' here; it signifies to reach out and take hold, to seize. The word for 'power' is 'dunamis'; inherent power. This woman, by faith, reached out and took the inward ability to conceive seed. She reached out, not in presumption, but in eager, urgent, faith to take hold of something that had been offered to her. And lest we should forget, the scripture reminds us, **when she was past age**. I don't mean to be rude or frivolous, but Sarah was 'past it'. This was no teenager; her life lay behind her, not ahead. Many come to a place where they are content to live in what they have, but not Sarah. Nor is this obscurantism; Sarah is not pretending here. She has recognised the hopelessness of her condition. The chances have all gone; life is over. The scripture is careful to tell us that both Abraham and Sarah were fully aware of Sarah's condition and of Abraham's; they knew that this was a combination of Abraham's body, 'now dead' and 'the deadness of Sarah's womb' (Rom 4:19, Gen 18:11).

What was it that Sarah reached out to claim? **And Jehovah said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, who am old? Is anything too hard for Jehovah? At the set time I will return unto thee, when the season cometh round, and Sarah shall have a son. (Gen 18:13-14 ASV)** She had heard a word which pointed her beyond her incapability and directly to God Himself.

Let's see the pattern of this. Sarah heard the visitors say **Sarah, thy wife shall have a son**. Her immediate reaction was to become aware of her own inadequacy; her language betrays her thinking **'Shall I indeed bear a child, when I am so old?' (Gen 18:13 NASB)** We can see that there absolutely no God-consciousness in this reaction; there is acute 'Sarah-consciousness'. She hears a predictive word from God but it only underlines her own powerlessness; the double 'I' betrays her. Sarah is saying 'I can't'. How often this becomes our reaction to some promise of God; I can't. I can't. She had overheard the promise and did not believe it. We often overhear promises; they have no power until they are spoken to us.

This is where we must hear the word of God spoken directly to us. The response is wonderfully God-conscious. In response to Sarah's 'I can't' we hear God's 'I can'. **Is any thing too hard for Jehovah?** That is the question we must continually return to. Not 'can I' but 'can God'? Jehovah was no stranger to them; this was not a challenge to step into unknown territory, God had revealed something of the nature of Jehovah. God was answering Sarah's 'I can't' with His own 'I can'. Answer it, Sarah, in your heart. Don't just nod wisely and say 'yes, I see'. Answer the question; **is any thing too hard for Jehovah?** and then comes the specific promise **at the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son. (Gen 18:14 KJV)** There is a pattern here that we do well to take to our hearts... I can't. God can. God will... and so you shall. When God says "I will" you may safely say "I shall".

I don't know whether or not she took hold of the word at that exact moment, or later. The account in Hebrews says that Sarah did something because of something else; **Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. (Heb 11:11 KJV)** Her stretching out to take hold of the promise was possible because 'she judged Him faithful'. Wonderful, Sarah, you've got it!! This necessary miracle does not depend upon your ability or faithfulness, but upon His. 'Judged' is a good choice of word here, Sarah assessed the situation, and came to a considered judgment that He who had promised was 'faithful'. This realisation changes every perspective; He is faithful who has promised. Stack up all the 'cons', as high as you like, every impossibility, tick them off one by one; this is faith without pretending. Now that you have your list of why it can never happen here is a single fact to put into the 'pros' list; He is faithful who has promised. Does Paul's prayer for 'entire sanctification' fill you with desolation when you consider the impossibility of it all? **And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1Th 5:23 KJV)** If it does, good, but do read the next verse **Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.**

Sarah believed, not just for an exciting moment, but for 9 months of patient waiting. She 'judged' that He was faithful who had promised, and was prepared to base her life on that judgement. So may we.

I don't know whether or not a teenager in Nazareth ever thought about these things, but I do know that she followed Sarah's pattern. She was clearly overwhelmed at the visit of the angel. **thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. (Luke 1:31 KJV)** Her immediate question was **'How shall this be, seeing I know not a man'** The angel's reply, in essence, was very simple... The Holy Spirit. Gabriel then went on to share t

he miracle of Elisabeth; **she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month were her that was called barren because with God no word is without power.** For so the literal translation runs. How can these things be? Because God's word has power within it.

Mary's response was beautiful; **And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her. (Luk 1:38 KJV)** May I extemporise a little? Let it be, not according to my fears, and self-conscious helplessness; not according to my feelings or what others have told me; but be it unto me 'according to thy word'. She judged Him faithful who had promised.

Although the circumstances must be very different to those of Sarah and Mary the declaration of Elisabeth will be true for each one of us; **And blessed is s/he that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord. (Luk 1:45 KJV).**

The pattern always holds true.
I can't but God can. God will and so I shall.

Re: Abraham, My Friend_50 - posted by RobertW (), on: 2004/12/21 10:55

Hi Bro Ron,

This is great. I keyed in on one place where you wrote, "judged" is a good choice of word here, Sarah assessed the situation, and came to a considered judgment that He who had promised was "faithful." I noticed that she 'laughed' in her heart, even though these men were obviously agents of God (some say a theophanic view of the Trinity). There was a turning point it seems. Do you think that the article of evidence that 'sealed the case' was when God revealed the very thoughts of her heart in such a direct and surprising way. "You did laugh!" It makes me think of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 14, But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth. When the secret of her heart was made manifest it seems that the 'deal was sealed.' The revelation of God and the demonstration of His ability to search out and readily hear things we believe only to be known ourselves. This is something only God could do. "Tell me what I'm thinking!" Tell me what I dreamed last night (as with Nebuchadnezzar). It is at those times when God reveals the power of His revelation that it seems FAITH rises in our hearts like no other time.

God Bless,

-Robert

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2004/12/21 11:15

Quote:
-----Do you think that the article of evidence that 'sealed the case' was when God revealed the very thoughts of her heart in such a direct and surprising way. "You did laugh!"

It wouldn't be the last time..

And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did. So when the Samaritans were come unto him, they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days. And many more believed because of his own word; And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world. (Joh 4:39-42 KJV)