

Devotional Thoughts :: Abraham, My Friend_39**Abraham, My Friend_39 - posted by philologos (), on: 2004/10/5 7:51**

Abraham, My Friend
The Making of a Praying Man_39

the sitting, running, lying, standing man

Some 38 devotionals ago, Greg asked me begin a series of devotionals with the brief of covering some foundation issues. As the website has 'prayer' as a main focus I decided that I could combine both by a meditation on the preparation of Abraham as 'a praying man'. It may appear that at times we have lost sight of the target but it is not so. The target comes into clearer vision in our next chapter of Genesis, but the route has not been random. Prayer is based in relationship. Not academic or ritual relationship but a dynamic link between Creator and creature. The man who does not pray denies his creaturehood; whatever his theology he is a practising atheist. Relationship is a growing thing and we have needed to see how God initiated this relationship and made Abraham the great example of access to God by faith (or justification). We have seen some of his failures, but even these are not wasted in God's shaping of His vessel. We have seen the aberration of human energy focused in achieving the will of God, and we have seen Abraham brought to the place of an abject consciousness of his own weakness, inability and deadness. We have also seen God establishing a covenant with him. This is vital; prayer depends upon permanent relationship, not promise or impression.

Of course we can pray from the first day, but to be shaped into a praying man will take God some time in the individual. As this next chapter dawns, we will begin to make a sharper focus on the making of a praying man.

As Genesis 18 opens we read again that Jehovah appeared unto him... How often we have remarked that it is ever God who takes the initiative. Even though Abraham is now in covenant relation, and bears in his body the private but indelible marks of ownership, God must still take the first step. What a wonderful thing it is that we have a God who has chosen self-disclosure. No human power or desire can enable us to discover God; we know nothing that He has not specifically revealed. Speculative theology is a peculiarly human arrogance. So the time has come for God to take the next step in the shaping of his praying man, and he appears to Abraham as he sits in the tent door in the heat of the day. It's a moment of rest and reflection. The sun is high and hot and Abraham shelters from its presence in the doorway of his tent.

We have watched this tent for some time now. It is the symbol of the pilgrim; By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; (Heb 11:9 NASB) It is the symbol of his impermanence and unsatisfied longing; For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come. (Heb 13:14 KJV) We have watched him building altars but pitching his tent; the first are his permanent records of his devotion to God, the latter has left no record. His pilgrimage left no mark on the human landscape, but every step was known to God. Such are God's praying men; their memorials are not in stone where men may worship or mock them but in eternal consequences which neither man nor time can erase.

I wonder what he was thinking about? Isaac, I suspect. Isaac unborn, unconceived as yet, but already a fixed reality by faith. Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (Heb 11:1 KJV) The thing long hoped for had become 'substance'. In his heart he had the evidence of things not yet seen. God had named the unborn son and God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac...(Gen 17:19 KJV) and Abraham had believed... him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were. (Rom 4:17 KJV) The Romans record the story sums up Abraham's state; ...fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. (Rom 4:21 KJV)

Sitting seems to be the position of expectancy. But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. (Heb 10:12-13 KJV); patient expectancy. There is time to stand and fight, and a time to sit and wait in anticipation. We are familiar with the phrase 'tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem' but the Greek is 'kathizo' which means to 'sit down'. Our familiar phrase ought really to have been translated 'sit down in the city of Jerusalem'. It is also the position of work completed.

He had nothing more to do He sat down; they had nothing more to do (at this stage) they must sit down too. Shall I be misunderstood if I say real praying must begin with no praying? The early Pentecostals were famous for their 'waiting' or 'tarrying meetings', where much time was spent in agonizing prayer. I wonder how folk would respond if we organized some 'Sitting Meetings'? What must I do to receive the promised Spirit? Just sit down... but don't go to sleep! I watched a video clip of a baptism this week and noted the contribution of the person being baptized. He just seemed to put himself into the hands of the baptizers and then did nothing! Lazy or wise? I have conducted a few hundred water baptisms and I always prepared them with the same words; 'please don't help me!' The only person I ever almost lost was someone who tried to 'help me'!

So, he sits in faith, knowing that God will choose the moment. Abraham's visitors arrived suddenly without warning. And he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, (Gen 18:2 KJV) He doesn't seem to have seen them coming. He lifts up his eyes and there they are, right 'by him'. At this point it seems as though Jehovah appeared to him and lo, three men stood by him. Is this the three-in-one? Abraham addresses the visitors as 'My Lord' and used 'thees and thous' but then switches to 'you and yours'. But we don't need to commit ourselves to one view at this time, the important thing is to note Abraham's response to his guests; he ran to meet them from the tent door. Perhaps it would be in order to remind ourselves that this old man, dozing in the shade, is 100 years old. Just one glimpse of the LORD and he bursts into action. He runs to meet them and throws himself at their feet. What a welcome! Had he known the hymn, I'm sure he would have sang..

Saviour of all, to Thee we bow,
 And own Thee faithful to Thy word;
 We hear Thy voice, and open now
 Our hearts to entertain our Lord.

Come in, come in, Thou heavenly Guest;
 Delight in what Thyself hast given,
 On thine own gifts and graces feast,
 And make the contrite heart Thy heaven.

Although we often hear preachers say that the first reference to the worship of God is Gen 22, in fact the first reference is right here; '...and bowed himself toward the ground, (Gen 18:2 KJV) where the word 'bowed' is the word for worship; to prostrate oneself. He sits, he runs, he worships... I love this old man! No decorum here, no conscious dignity, no elaborate eastern greetings, just utter yieldedness to His divine guest. Do you begin to see why God called this man, 'My Friend, Abraham?' Would you be a praying man? Put away your 'prayer list' and come running to greet your Guest... now worship! Have you noticed this divine order? Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. (Mat 4:10 KJV) thou shalt worship... thou shalt serve.

When Satan stopped worshipping he fell. The Bible describes him as a cherub and says he was the 'anointed cherub'. The 'anointed priest' was the high priest and Lucifer was the greatest created being. The remaining cherubim continue their attendance upon God; and the four living creatures, having each one of them six wings, are full of eyes round about and within: and they have no rest day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come. (Rev 4:8 ASV) These are the holiest of the angels but have no eyes for their own holiness but only for His. They appear in scripture as completely God-conscious beings. I don't know how long they have been worshipping like this, but I do know that at a point in time one cherub took his eyes off God and began to admire himself; Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee. Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffick; therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold thee. (Eze 28:17-18 KJV) In the moment he ceased to worship his doom was sealed. Saved to serve, say the badges. Saved to worship, says the Book. Service will inevitably follow worship, but worship does not inevitably follow service. First the blossom and sweet perfume, then the fruit.

There is a wonderful audacity about genuine faith. Abraham calls him, My Lord and acknowledges himself as thy servant, but Abraham wants Him to become his Guest. He has worshipped now he will work; Abraham hastened into the tent and instructs Sarah to make ready quickly three measures of fine meal then Abraham ran unto the herd and fetched calf tender and good. In turn Abraham's young man hastened to dress it. Busy days follow times of genuine worship. Abraham

am is willing to spend and be spent; the man who has abandoned himself in worship is not one to measure the expense.

And then after the sitting, running, lying, and working comes the standing; And he took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat. (Gen 18:8 KJV) He is the servant here, waiting upon His Lord. He has no agenda and no petitions. There is no sitting now, he stands while his Guest eats; Abraham is simply available to God; Unto thee do I lift up mine eyes, O thou that sittest in the heavens. Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their master, As the eyes of a maid unto the hand of her mistress; So our eyes look unto Jehovah our God, Until he have mercy upon us. (Psa 123:1-2 ASV) To such men God will reveal his secrets.