

Abraham's Arrival

Valleys Family Church Sermon
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 15th May 2016

Intro-

Read Gen 12:4-20

Perseverance

- Abraham is an amazing example to us of persevering in faith when there is a delay in God fulfilling His promises:

-there was a huge delay in the fulfilment of the blessings God promised to him in 12:1-3 of children, and in verse 7 of the land God would give them:

- v7 'To your seed/offspring'- Abraham still had no kids
 - -Canaanites were in the land-v6. Hence the references to trees a lot 'tree of Moreh', 'tree of Mamre'- these are trees on land belonging to people friendly with Abraham- he was allowed to camp on/near their land.
 - -v10 'There was a famine in the land'- and it was so bad he had to leave the land God had promised and go to Egypt.
- Despite these setbacks Abraham persevered in faith- his faith was based on God rather than circumstance. He trusted God despite two testing factors: appearances and delays.

a) Despite Appearances

- Abraham could not see any visible sign of a fulfilment of the promises and yet he still believed God.
- 2 Cor 5:7 'for we walk by faith, not by sight.' Sometimes it is encouraging because we see signs that the Lord is working or we get an excited feeling about what He is doing.
- In the same way, Thomas could do no other than believe when Jesus appeared in front of him!
- But sometimes we just have to hold on to the word of God and believe God will make a way where there presently is no way. In these situations we are being like Abraham, the man of faith and there is great blessing in this, as Jesus said John 20:29 Jesus said to him (Thomas), "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

b) Despite Delays

- Abraham died in faith, he held on to his faith for his whole life. Finishing well is so much more important than just starting well- me in Raglan fun run. Will we be known as people of faith who have persevered in faith to the end? -

Heb 11:8-10

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, without knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the promised land as a stranger in a foreign country. He lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God...

Heb 11:13...All these people died in faith, without having received the things they were promised. However,

they saw them and welcomed them from afar. And they acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. Those who say such things show that they are seeking a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

- Sometimes God says something and it happens straight away- the 'suddenly's of God. We all love it when that happens. But sometimes God promises something and there is a delay. What are we like when there is a delay? Do we keep believing?
- A seed planted takes time to grow; it requires faith and patience on the part of the one waiting for it.
- Jesus gave the illustration of God's word being sown into our hearts like seed. One type of soil received the word but the ground was shallow so that the word could not get rooted and when testing times came they gave up. In Luke 8:13 Jesus said 'But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop'.
- What promises are you holding on to and believing from God? Are you still holding on to them or have you let them go? God wants us, like Abraham, to pick them up again and persevere in faith.
- A recent story in the news (Tuesday 5 April 2016 in the Independent) was a great story of a promise it appeared would never be fulfilled but amazingly was:
 - A D-Day veteran who jilted his childhood sweetheart because of his wartime trauma has proposed to her 70 years later - and she said yes. Roy Vickerman, from Hartshill, Staffordshire, was helped to find Nora Jackson's address by a local radio DJ after he called the show to talk about his lost love. The 90-year-old then went to her home with a bouquet of flowers to apologise for breaking off their engagement in 1946 but told the taxi driver to wait outside for a few minutes as he did not know if she was married to someone else, Mail Online reports. Instead, the widowed Ms Jackson, 89, threw her arms around him and a year on the couple celebrated their second engagement at Mr Vickerman's 90th birthday party. The couple first met at school when Mr Vickerman was evacuated from London to Ms Jackson's hometown of Stoke on Trent. He said when he arrived at the school, he stood at the front of the class and noticed a "pretty girl". When he saw her again later at a local hotel where she was with a group of friends, he asked her out on a date. A short while later the couple became engaged but Mr Vickerman, then 18, was called up to fight in the war. He took part in the D-Day landings in June 1944 and the Battle of the Bulge - one of the biggest and deadliest battles of the war which lasted six weeks between December 1944 and January 1945 and cost around 110,000 Allied casualties. When Mr Vickerman returned the couple resumed their relationship but it soon broke down again as he was suffering from what would now be diagnosed as post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). He told BBC Midlands Today: "I just wanted to be on my own, I called off the engagement. "And Nora was very, very good. She was a lady and she sent the ring back to me."Both moved on with their lives and later married other people and had children but now Ms Jackson is wearing the original ring Mr Vickerman used to propose all those years ago.

Worship

- Abraham is an amazing example to us of building a foundation of worship in our lives. He was always building an altar to God wherever he went!
- v7 So he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him.
- Worship was a priority in Abraham's life- he builds two altars to the Lord in this passage- one in v7 Shechem and one in v8 Bethel. In the next chapter he would return to the one at Bethel and 'call on the name of the Lord' and he would also build an altar to the Lord in Mamre (Hebron). So worship of God was a lifestyle choice of Abraham.
- **A lifestyle of worship**- it must have been difficult for Abraham regarding the worship of the Lord as he had come from a complete culture of idol worship. His

father Terah was an idol worshipper and both Ur and Haran were centres of worship of the moon god Sin. Canaan was well known for idolatry. In this environment Abraham sticks his neck out and demonstrates unashamedly that he is a worshipper of the one true God. It was not a one-off show, but a lifestyle he chose.

- As Christians we can just be singers of songs on Sunday or, like Abraham, we can choose to develop a lifestyle of worship, a lifestyle of gratitude to God and sacrifice to Him. Such worship is from the heart, not just from the lips.
- First love- passion for Jesus=foundation for our lives. Jesus' message to the Church at Ephesus in Rev 2:3-4 ' I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.' The Ephesians had persevered in faith, but if they had lost their passion for the one they were doing it for it became futile. The sad thing is that when they first believed they had such a great love for God and Paul prayed for them that 'being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.' (Eph 3:17-19).
- How is your passion for Jesus? Has it grown in depth?
- Any relationship you get out what you put in- marriage is an example- us 20 years! Make sure we have time off together each week- a choice to spend time together and enjoy life together and love deepens. Same with God- as we spend quality time together love deepens, passion increases.
- Some Christians feel defeated in their devotional times to the Lord and just need to get back to that place of enjoying reading their Bibles, worshipping and praying to the Lord. A little and often is the best advice here- not trying to run a marathon. Sometimes just going through the process of giving thanks until the feelings come back and we feel truly thankful.
- Worship involves an element of sacrifice. These altars built by Abraham were places he could literally give a sacrifice to God - it would cost him. The New Testament is not the sacrifice of an animal because Jesus is our sacrifice for sin; rather it is giving our bodies (lives) back to God for Him to use. Rom 12:1 Therefore I urge you, brothers, on account of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.
- When we look at the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross to save us, the correct response is sacrifice back to Him of true worship.
- Light of the World (Here I am to worship) -[Tim Hughes](#) wrote this song in 1999 as a response to how he felt after reading [Philippians 2](#). The passage speaks about Christ's humility and how He willingly left His throne in heaven, came to earth as a man, and sacrificed Himself on the cross all because of His love for us. With this passage in mind, Tim picked up his guitar and, as he sang, the words to the song flowed out, but he was not satisfied with the chorus and felt that it did not flow well with the song. For several months, he struggled with the chorus and even put the song aside for about six months before finally finishing the song. However, he was still not confident in the chorus. It was not until he played this song at his home church [Soul Survivor](#), and his pastor told him to play the song more often, that he realized the potential the song had. Since then, this song has spread and become widely known. [Tim Hughes](#) himself said. "No one has been more surprised than myself at seeing how God has used this worship song."^[4] The themes in the song are Life of Jesus, Thankfulness, and Worship. (source Wikipedia)
- True worship will always involve the element of cost to us: Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German Lutheran pastor and theologian. He was also a participant in the German Resistance movement against Nazism, a founding member of the Confessing Church. His involvement in plans by members of the Abwehr (the German Military Intelligence Office) to assassinate Adolf Hitler resulted in his arrest in April 1943 and his subsequent execution by hanging in April 1945, shortly before the war's end. His view of Christianity's role in the secular world has become very influential.
"Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again and again, the gift which must

be asked for, the door at which a man must knock. Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son: 'Ye were bought at a price', and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God."

– **Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship**

Integrity

- Abraham here messes up regarding his integrity and runs the risk of losing it all, if it were not for God's grace to him. v13 'Please say that you are my sister so that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may live on account of you'
- **Integrity matters.** In the dictionary, integrity is the state of being complete, unified- it is when our words and deeds match up.
- John Maxwell, a well know Christian teacher on leadership put integrity as the most important ingredient of leadership.

Abraham tried to minimise his sin

- He said a half-truth. v13 'Please say that you are my sister so that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may live on account of you' In Gen 20:12 Abraham does it again and gives this explanation 'Besides, she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father though not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife.'- she was in fact his half-sister. He was deceiving others- so he was actually lying.
- When we lie or deceive others we will often justify the reasons for this. Often the excuse is 'everyone else does it'. Piracy is prevalent today, as Christians let's be different. File sharing is a legal practise, file sharing a film we have not paid for is not. How big is your Itunes library? How many of those tunes have you actually used your own money on, so that the artist can get paid?

Abraham's sin harmed others

- A lack of integrity will harm other people. Although *he* was comfortable with this 'white lie' others were not- others were harmed by Abram's sin. We think our sin affects only us, but like a pebble in a pond it has far reaching repercussions. Terrorist bombings are like ripples affecting a huge number of people's lives. Tata Steel plant- affects a huge number of people, not just the workers
- He was devaluing the most precious gift God had given him- his wife- he treated her as if she was a possession rather than his wife and equal.

Abraham could not hide his sin

- Deception cannot be hidden indefinitely. The truth came out eventually. 1Tim 5:24-25 The sins of some people are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later. So also good works are conspicuous, and even those that are not cannot remain hidden. Lk 12:2-3 'Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops.' A Christian I heard preaching in Abergavenny (can't remember if it was Bill Wilson or Colin Urquart) said 'It's a lot easier and less painful if we discipline ourselves than if someone else has to discipline us'.

*Abraham may not have realised it but he was on
the brink of losing the promises God had given to him*

- His wife was the key to all the promises of God being fulfilled- the promises were given to his seed and Sarai was to bear him that seed.
- Integrity matters because it keeps us from in a few moments destroying what it has taken all our lives to achieve.
- Billy Graham said 'Integrity is the glue that holds our way of life together. We must constantly strive to keep our integrity intact. When wealth is lost, nothing is lost; when health is lost, something is lost; when character is lost, all is lost.'
- It's easy when the Bible gives an honest portrayal of people's lives, warts and all to point the finger and say 'bad Abraham' and think we would never make the same mistakes he made, but are we? How is our integrity currently doing?
- John Maxwell : 'Image is what people think we are, integrity is what we really are'.

'You will only become what you are becoming right now

...Though you cannot go back and make a brand new start, my friend. Anyone can start from now and make a brand new end.'

There was once an Emperor from China who had no children and needed to choose a successor. Thousands of children from across the kingdom came to the palace and were surprised when the Emperor exclaimed that he was going to choose one of them. He gave them all a seed. They were to go home to their villages, plant the seed in a pot and tend it for a year. When they return in a year, the Emperor would judge their efforts and choose his successor. There was a boy named Ling who received his seed and returned to his village. His mother helped him to choose a pot and put some soil into it. Ling watered his pot every day. Once a week, the children of the village would get together to compare their plants. After a few weeks, there were signs of life in all but Ling's pot. The weeks passed and Ling continued to water his pot every day. After a few months, the pots really came to life. Some had trees starting to grow, some had flowers and some had leafy shrubs. Poor old Ling still had nothing growing in his pot, leading the other children to make fun of him.

Ling continued to water his pot every day. A year passed and it was time to return to the palace to show what had grown and decide on the new heir. Ling was anxious as his pot still showed no signs of life. "What if they punish me? They won't know that I've watered it every day, they'll think that I'm lazy." His mother looked him in the eye and explained that whatever the consequences were, he had to return and show the Emperor his barren pot. Ling and the other children entered the palace gates. By now, some of the plants were looking magnificent and the children were wondering which one the Emperor would choose. Ling was embarrassed as other children looked at his lifeless pot and scoffed.

The Emperor came out and started to make his way through the crowd, looking at the many impressive trees, shrubs and flowers that were on display. The boys all puffed their chests out and tried to look as regal as possible, hoping that they would be chosen as the heir to the empire. Then the Emperor came to Ling. He looked at the pot then he looked at Ling. "What happened here?" He asked. "I watered the pot every day, but nothing ever grew." Ling muttered nervously. Then he grumbled something to himself and moved on. After a few hours, the Emperor finally finished his assessment. He stood in front of the children and congratulated them on their efforts.

"Clearly, some of you desperately want to be Emperor and would do anything to make that happen, but there is one boy that I would like to point out as he has come to me with nothing. Ling, come here please." "Oh no," thought Ling. He slowly sauntered to the front of the group, holding his barren pot. The Emperor held up the pot for all to see and the other children laughed. Then the Emperor continued, "A year ago, I gave you all a

seed. I told you to go away, plant the seed and return with your plant. The seeds that I gave you all were boiled until they were no longer viable and wouldn't grow, but I see before me thousands of plants and only one barren pot. Integrity and courage are more important values for leadership than proud displays, so Ling here will be my heir."

Summary

- Perseverance
- Worship
- Integrity

Song:

Light of the World