

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Learning difficult lessons with Abraham: Learning to let go

Introduction

Good morning. We come to the fourth and final talk in the series 'Learning difficult lessons with Abraham'. The first talk was about 'Learning to leave', emigrating, leaving home, family and friends. It took some time for Abraham to eventually arrive in the land that God had prepared for him. I have two nephews who have emigrated and now live in different countries. Although with modern technology maintaining contact is relatively easy, it is still not the same as face to face contact. Abraham did not go back to his original home to see family members or friends and he had no technology to allow instant communication! But what Abraham had was a firm commitment to God and this we will see in this last talk. The second talk was 'Learning to wait'. God had promised a number of things to Abraham but the key promise that he and Sarah would have a son was a long time in being fulfilled. Abraham and Sarah were about 100 years old when God fulfilled His promise and their son Isaac was born. The third talk was 'Learning from family difficulties'. Before Isaac was born, Sarah thought, maybe in not so many words, that God needed a helping hand to fulfil His promise to them. So we have a surrogate in the form of Hagar, Sarah's Egyptian maid servant. Far from being a help, it only brought strife and eventually heart ache into the home. It was a hard lesson to wait for God's timing. With our final talk, 'Learning to let go' we have an equally, or maybe the hardest, heart rending situation for this elderly couple.

Letting Go

Let us read from Genesis 22:1-13, *"Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' Then He said, 'Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.' So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you.' So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together. But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, 'My father!' And he said, 'Here I am, my son.' Then he said, 'Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?' And Abraham said, 'My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.' So, the two of them went together. Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!' So he said, 'Here I am.' And He said, 'Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.' Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son."*

Many Christians when they read and consider this section of God's word, they see in it a wonderful picture of God the Father in Abraham, and the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, in Isaac, and the journey to the cross. This is a profitable consideration when we consider what our Lord Jesus said in Luke 24:27, *"And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."*

However, for our talk this morning we are going to focus upon the key word in Genesis 22:1, *"Now it came to pass after these things that God **tested** Abraham."* It is the word "tested" or it could be rendered "proved". God was seeking to prove the depth of Abraham's faith. We see in Genesis 22:1-13 ample indication that Abraham had faith. But would Abraham's faith stand the test of offering up his son as a burnt offering (Genesis 22:3)? Abraham rose early in the morning. This I believe indicates that Abraham was not going to delay but showed his obedience by starting at the earliest possible moment. It was a three day journey to God's appointed place. Plenty of time for doubts to creep into the mind, Genesis 22:4. Then in Genesis 22:5 we have the confidence of faith as Abraham says to his servants, *"Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and **we will come back to you.**"* Now you might say that Abraham does not mention offering up Isaac as a burnt offering but that was exactly what God

had asked him to do. In the Old Testament the burnt offering was the highest act of worship to God. It was an offering solely for God's pleasure and it was totally consumed in the fire. Even in this situation Abraham believed in the God of resurrection and he says to the servants "**we will come back to you.**" It is with this faith that Abraham is taken to the very brink of sacrificing Isaac before God calls a halt and a substitute for Isaac is found (Genesis 22:12). It is at this point that Abraham notices nearby a ram nearby caught in the thicket by its horns (Genesis 22:13). God saw into Abraham's heart and knew that Abraham was willing to let go of that which was most precious to him - his son Isaac.

There are many occasions in our lives when we may have to let go. The family is a good situation in which we find letting go. The first letting go is by the child itself. I remember with our children there came a time as they learned to walk, first by going round the furniture but eventually they let go and start to walk on their own. As our children grow up we go through various stages of 'letting go'. They play outside with their friends and we stop constantly watching them. We may from time to time go and check that things are all right. Then there is the moment when they want to go to school on their own, with friends, and not have a parent walking along with them holding their hand. The time may come when university beckons and they want to live away from home - becoming more independent! However, financial support is needed when children go to university. Then there is that major step, marriage and with it comes the full blown independence, turning the letting go into reality. We do not forget our children, and as parents, we are always there for them if they find a need where support is required from parents.

With ourselves we might have had certain hopes and dreams of what we thought we would achieve but circumstances change and we may need to let go of these and concentrate on other issues and challenges.

As I prepare this radio talk, it is only two weeks since my wife and I attended the funeral of her sister. In September last year (2013), my sister-in-law was diagnosed with cancer. The diagnosis and prognosis were not good. There was no surgery solution, chemotherapy was tried but proved to be unbearable. A few minor procedures were done to provide a measure of immediate relief but four months after being diagnosed, my wife's sister died. Three score years and ten (see Psalm 90:10) had been passed and some might say, in an academic kind of way, "Well, we all have to die sometime, especially if we are old!" I would probably agree that we have to die sometime, but when it is someone quite young there may be the additional sadness because we do not expect the young to die - although they do! But even with regard to those we love who are older, whether parents, sisters, brothers, or other family members, death brings with it sadness and sorrow. In some way death is a kind of final cutting off. Not like emigration where you can hop onto an aeroplane to go and visit! There are no aeroplanes to the other side of the grave for a quick visit. This separation does really involve a "letting go" but not a forgetting. I do not say it is easy to "let go" or as some might say, "Adjusting to the changed situation!" Letting go may take from days to possibly years and for some they are just not able to fully "let go".

When we think of Abraham and that he was prepared to let go of Isaac, I am sure he was not forgetting the promises that God had made concerning Isaac. At the end of Genesis 21:12, God had said to Abraham, "*In Isaac your seed shall be called.*" I have no doubt that this promise and maybe others were firmly in Abraham's mind as he took the journey to sacrifice Isaac. Possibly he did not know exactly how God would keep His promise, but he knew that God would keep His promise to the letter. God does not lie!

Christians have the wonderful promise made by our Lord Jesus Christ in John 14:2-3, "*In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.*" The Lord Himself is involved in the momentous occasion of the act of resurrection: a personal intervention that will not be left to angels! It is like the Queen coming out of the palace to greet the crowds at the gate and say to them all, "Come with me, I have tea prepared for everyone." I admit it is a feeble illustration compared to the glorious occasion of the rapture which involves the Son of God. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15 both give additional information connected with the rapture event. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 concentrates on the order of the resurrection, the dead in Christ come out of the graves followed by living Christians being caught up and both go to meet the Lord in the air. In 1 Corinthians 15 however, we have the changes that will take place; 1 Corinthians 15:42-53 indicate that we are changed and take on the features of incorruption, glory, power and immortality with our new spiritual bodies, which will be in the image of the Son (Romans 8), and that these bodies will be suitable for heaven and the Father's house.

A hymn by T Kelly (1769-1854) I believe is a great help in the circumstances of life, including times of sorrow.

*The night is now far spent,
The day is drawing nigh,
Soon will the morning break
In radiance through the sky;
O let the thought our spirits cheer,
The Lord Himself will soon appear.*

*Though men our hope deride,
Nor will the truth believe,
We in His word confide,
And it will ne'er deceive,
Soon all that grieves shall pass away,
And saints shall see a glorious day.*

*For us the Lord intends
A bright abode on high,
The place where sorrow ends,
And nought is known but joy:
With such a hope let us rejoice,
We soon shall hear the Saviour's voice.*

Just as Abraham expected to have his son Isaac restored to him after the sacrifice, then Christians can expect to see one another in that heavenly scene. I believe the following Scriptures indicate that we will see and know each other. 2 Samuel 12:23 states, “*Now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.*” King David had sinned in taking another man’s wife for his own carnal pleasure (2 Samuel 11:3-4). It resulted in Bathsheba becoming pregnant (2 Samuel 11:5). Because of this, David schemed to make it look like the child was the husband’s, but when that failed he organised the man’s death and then married Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:6-17). However, it obviously did not escape God’s notice. A son is born but in the judgement of God, the child dies (2 Samuel 12:15b-23). David is distraught that the child is ill (2 Samuel 12:16), but once the child has died then David changed his behaviour from praying for the child to recover to that of going into the house of the LORD to worship his God (2 Samuel 12:20). David accepted what God had done and that God was right in His actions. David was praying that God might change His mind and heal the young child. This change of behaviour puzzled the palace servants until David explained as we see in 2 Samuel 12:23. The child was not coming back. But some day David would go to him, that is die: and then he would see the child again. Many might be perplexed that God would take away a young child and not let the child grow up and have a full life. I believe that in this situation God who knows the future might have considered that life might be intolerable for the child growing up and discovering David’s abominable behaviour. However, this is only speculation and we must leave such things and acknowledge that God knows best even in the most difficult of situations.

In Matthew 17:1-8 we have one of the accounts of the Transfiguration where Peter, James and John see the glorious change that comes upon the Lord Jesus Christ and, at the same time, two major characters of Old Testament days appear and they are in conversation with Him. They are instantly recognised as Moses and Elijah. Now it is obvious that the three disciples had never met these two Old Testament men of God as they had died hundreds of years before the disciples were born. We presume that traditional word of mouth descriptions of these people had been handed down over the years - a kind of word picture. From this description, the disciples knew with certainty that the two men who were talking with the Lord Jesus were indeed Moses and Elijah.

David was confident in seeing his child. The disciples recognised both Moses and Elijah. Abraham knew he would come back to his servants with Isaac. All these I believe are clear indications that we will know each fellow believer when we are in heaven.

For Christians, the “letting go” is not the end. Christians can look forward to a time in the future when they will see Christian family members and Christian friends who have died. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13, Paul states, “*But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.*” Hope is connected with the heavenly scene, the rapture, the joy of seeing our Lord Jesus Christ and that vast redeemed company of glorified saints. We do sorrow and, at some point in time, we may come to the point of letting go without forgetting. But, the Christian has the realisation of hope being changed to reality and we experience the joy of reunion.

It may be that some listeners today are going through this time of “letting go”. I trust that what has been said will be of comfort and encouragement to help us move through the sorrow to let go, holding on to “not forgetting” and embrace the certainty of the Christian hope for a bright future in the Lord’s presence with all the redeemed.

To Conclude

Before I close I want to ask each listener, “Do you know the Lord Jesus Christ as your own personal Saviour?” This is an important question. Salvation is an intensely personal issue. Salvation cannot be acquired second hand. No one can make the decision for you. Everyone else in your family may be a Christian but that does not entitle you to the same blessings and benefits. Being a Christian is not inherited; it is not passed down through the family like a

peerage. Neither is it acquired by "Going to Church". Church attendance does not earn loyalty points to be exchanged for a place in heaven. Being a good person does not guarantee a place in heaven. First, the Bible tells us that there is none good, see Romans 3:10. In Matthew 19:16-22 we have the situation of a person coming to the Lord Jesus and saying, "*Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?*" The Lord initially replies by saying, "*Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.*" This was the first test and the person side stepped the challenge; he did not acknowledge Jesus as God. Seeing he had asked what he might do, the Lord Jesus said keep the commandments and proceeded to list those that had a direct impact on how we deal with people. The man said he had done these from his youth. There was one commandment, the tenth, that Jesus did not specifically state, probably because He had read the man's heart. So the Lord said, "*If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.*" In this statement the Lord highlights two specific issues: first, give up everything for Himself, in other words, let go of this life for treasure in heaven. Second, fully follow the Lord Jesus Christ. In this incident we have all the elements of the Gospel message and they can be summarised in three points:

- Acknowledge that Jesus is God the Son.
- Repent of your sins. That means a complete turnaround in your life, not trusting in your old life anymore, whether good or bad, for salvation.
- Finally, accept Christ as your Saviour and place Him first in your life.

Thank you for listening and the Lord bless you today.

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