

“Obedience” Genesis 12:10-20 (Communion)

Introduction:

Bumper stickers – there are all kinds, and some are rather amusing. Around the corner from us is a van with the bumper sticker that says,

“Warning: Mother of four boys. May nap at red lights.”

Another says: “Honk if parts fall off!” (ever have a car like that?)

Or, “I’ve lost my mind and I am pretty sure the kids took it!”

If Abraham had a bumper sticker on his cart as he made his way to Egypt as outlined in our passage today, it might read, “Don’t follow me. I’m lost too!”

Last week we saw how God made some amazing promises to Abraham. God said this man would be blessed, would be the father of many nations, and would be a blessing to others. God would do this, if Abraham only believed and followed where God led him. God led Abraham to the land of Canaan and said he would give it to him and his family.

Abraham became not only the father of the nation of Israel but also the example of faith for Christians. The Apostle Paul writes to the church in Rome: “What does Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” (Romans 4:3)

And since he is such a great example to follow when it comes to having faith, he always did what was right and honourable, correct? If the Bible was a novel or the fabrication of the church or some other human endeavor I am sure that is exactly what we would discover – a perfect Abraham. But scripture is not fiction. It is real history of real people – warts and all. And in our passage today we see Abraham had his flaws – and we need not follow him in this!

Read Genesis 12:10-20

What a strange story to find in the Bible. But there it is ... a part of the history of Israel and apart of our heritage as Christians. What can we learn from this strange story?

1. Why Did Abraham Do What He Did?

Did you hear what Abraham did? Because there was a famine in the “Promised Land” where God led him, he went to live in Egypt for a time. There was food there. At least Abraham was not going back to where he had come from.

But when he arrived in Egypt he made a deal with his wife, Sarah. She would say she was his sister, and not his wife. This was a half-truth as they have the same father, though different mothers. (cf. Gen. 20:12) But why would Abraham ask his wife to speak this deception?

Fear. Abraham knew the Egyptians were suspicious of any strangers. He also knew they were powerful, and the kings of the land could claim any woman they wanted to be their bride.

Unmarried women were simply taken from their families – and if the king felt the family deserved it they would be given a bride price. If the woman was married it was a simple thing to make her single again – a sword or a spear to the husband usually looked after that matter.

Abraham does not know what lies ahead for him in Egypt, so he is doing what he can to protect himself. Fear causes him to not see clearly, and because of that he does not see the big picture any more. He only sees his danger, and forgets the promises of God...

Have you ever been in that place where fear paralyzes you? When you are so afraid that you can no longer think straight, or work through the problem properly? Maybe it was when you got the new job, or moved to the new community, or heard about a new virus called COVID 19.

2. This Fear is Contrary to What Faith Should be Teaching Us

Remember what God said to Abraham in the first of this chapter?

- I will make you into a great nation
- I will bless you
- I will make your name great
- I will make you a blessing

But Abraham enters the promised land, and there is drought. What good is the promise now?

So he packs up and heads to Egypt with his little band and now what of the promises?

In Egypt he faces the loss of his wife – who has no children – so what of the promise to be a great nation?

Can you see how fear undermines the promises of God?

Your husband promises to show you the most beautiful waterfall you have ever seen, but to get there you must walk a narrow, steep dirt path up the mountain. Fear of that trail can ruin the experience, prevent the promise of seeing this waterfall from being fulfilled....

3. Abraham Doubts God's Promises and Tries to Work things Out His Way

Abraham's plan is found in verse 13: "Say you are my sister and I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you."

Though Abraham will become known as the man of great faith, here his faith seems to waver. He seems unsure of the fact that God can and will deliver on all his promises. Circumstances seem to call for some intervention on his part.

That never happens in our worlds, does it? God gives us such great promises but we still feel like we have to step in and help God out a little. We decide that we need to do things our way...

The Pharisees of Jesus' day seemed to think they needed to give God a hand in the salvation business. They felt they needed to add their own good deeds, their righteousness to what God was offering to be saved. It is like those today who still feel they need to somehow earn God's forgiveness, do enough good deeds and then they will gain a place in heaven. I heard it again this week, "If I live a good life I will go to heaven." But that is saying, God's promise that salvation is through faith in Christ is not enough.

God says, "he gave his only begotten Son that whoever **believes** will not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16) But when we say we must add our good deeds to the mix we are saying we cannot trust God's promise. So we take things into our own hands, just like Abraham did...

4. Consequences of Not Believing God's Promises

Well, look what happens. As predicted, Pharaoh noticed how beautiful Sarah was – by the way, not bad to be able to turn heads at 65 years of age – and took her into his harem. He rewarded Abraham, her brother and the one responsible for her handsomely, giving Abraham sheep and cattle, donkeys and camels and servants. Abraham became a rich man because of this arrangement. Only thing is, his wife is sleeping with another man, and there is no way for God's promise to be fulfilled that through Abraham and Sarah God's would build a great nation.

By Abraham taking matters into his own hands he made a real mess of things for himself and those around him – especially for his poor wife, Sarah.

Think about the times we said we would do it our way instead of God's way and how terrible things turned out. I will suggest some categories, you fill in the blanks of what happened...

- In relationships, not following God's plan for healthy marriages, or even proper dating or relationships with other people
- In priorities, letting other things crowd Jesus off the throne of our lives
- In stewardship – or how we use our money, time and talent
- In worship, letting it slip in priority so that we take time to worship when it is convenient

Despite the popularity of Frank Sinatra's song, "I Did it My Way" we usually find that way of thinking leads to great disasters time and time again. Our way compared to God's way is never a good way. Abraham's scheme is suddenly exposed – by God – and Pharaoh is less than impressed. God has inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household and has revealed the source of his suffering: he has another man's wife. Pharaoh scolds Abraham and then sends him on his way – with all his newly acquired wealth.

Conclusion

This story could have ended so much worse for Abraham. He became fearful, and decided he must come up with a plan instead of waiting to see what God wanted him to do. His plan compromises his own integrity and that of his wife, and puts her at great risk. It would have been a complete disaster... if it was not for God.

This scripture text mentions God only once but it is very clear that God has been working all along. The God who says "I will..." had not abandoned Abraham. Despite his fears, despite his attempts to control the situation, despite putting himself and his wife Sarah at great risk – Pharaoh could have just as easily killed them for their shenanigans – God was still in control.

And God rescued Sarah out of the hands (and arms) of Pharaoh. She was given back to Abraham and that meant the possibility of Abraham and her having a family still existed.

God also deposited a whole bunch of wealth into Abraham's hands. Cattle, sheep, donkeys, camels and servants were his in abundance thanks to Pharaoh. But it was God who made this possible...

God can redeem our lives despite our failures and fears and doubts. He can cleanse our hearts and strengthen our resolve to live in obedience to him.

To fix our failures, our sins, He asks us to keep our eyes on Jesus. And that is what we intend on doing – today and every day. This morning we remember the cross and the love of God demonstrated on that cross. We, who can mess things up so bad – and we have time and time again – are still loved by God. In fact, "while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

So today if you identify with the obedient Abraham, or the fearful Abraham, know Jesus welcomes you to his table and in love says, lay that burden down. "If we confess our sin he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sin, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9).

That is really good news. Yes, God is still saying to those who trust and obey... "I will..."