

7,29,21 Rom. 4:9-25, Abraham, the Friend of God

I want to start by reading though several passages to set the stage for where we are going;

(Rom. 4:1-2 & 16-24) "What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him as righteousness."

"For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, (as it is written, "A father of many nations have I made you") in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist. In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, "So shall your descendants be." Without becoming weak in faith, he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. Therefore, it was also accounted to him as righteousness. Now not for his sake only was it written that it was accounted to him, but for our sake also, to whom it will be accounted, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead . . ."

(Heb. 11:17) "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son."

(Isa. 41:8) "But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, The descendants of Abraham, My friend."

Finally, James 2:23, “And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ And he was called the friend of God.”

In order to help us understand the significance of God’s desire to find faith in us, and to show the outcome of the development of that faith in Abraham being called “the friend of God”, I’m going to share from a variety of authors that address this.

And by the way, sometimes I copy and paste so much of what I’m reading by various people, that I lose track of who said what – that’s probably very unprofessional on my part, but I don’t think who said it is as important as what they said; at least that’s my rationale for this.

Ok, quote number one:

“There are many astonishing things in the Bible. Few of them, however, are more so than this - that God should desire a friend. We would think that God would be able to get on quite well without having men in that relationship with Himself. I say it is an astonishing thought that God, in all His self-sufficiency, His fullness, His creative power, should want a friend, but there it is - "Abraham, my friend".

As we go through this study, keep in mind that throughout Abraham’s life God was at work developing a relationship with him that would eventuate in what we see at the end of his life in the offering of Isaac.

I think the biggest advantage to you and me personally, considering the time we’re living in and what we are all going through in our own development, is recognizing in Abraham the ways God uses to get us to where we need to be.

“Probably in all the Bible there was no one who had greater reason than did Abraham to think of God's ways as being strange. And very rarely were they easy. Almost every step, if not every step, was fraught with confusion. But God was governed in all His dealings with Abraham by this one idea and

thought: to bring a man into such a relationship with Himself as to be able to speak of him as "My friend".

We hate being confused; we hate not knowing why God is doing what He's doing – why these things are happening to us. Especially those things that seem to completely contradict what the Bible says should happen.

The promise to Abraham that he would be the father of many nations was given when he was 75 years old, but Gen. 21:5 tells us that he was 100 years old when Isaac was born.

He not only had to wait 25 years, but by the time this was fulfilled, Abraham was totally incapable of having *any* children.

As we saw in Romans 4, 'Abraham did not waver in faith' about this. We waver all the time about everything.

And, by the way, Abraham died *without* being the father of many nations? That didn't happen in his lifetime.

Think about all the promises you and I 'claim' in the Bible to cover things we want to happen. What do we do when they *don't* happen?

I'm going to share another reading that explains this better than I can. What I'm working toward is to try to give you a solid definition through the life of Abraham of what friendship with God really means.

(Gen. 22:2) "Take your son, your only son, whom you love... and offer him"

"We cannot make too much of the seriousness of the crisis to which Abraham had now come. It might have raised the question of what kind of a God his God was, or who this God was to whom he had given his life, and there are many other questions and implications. All his consecration, his long years of waiting and traveling, his faithful obedience - and now, at one blow, it looked as though it was all shattered. To survive that, and, more

than that, to go through it triumphantly, is to explain what God means by friendship. That is the meaning of friendship - but what is it?

Well, if this is the Divine explanation of friendship, and God is working with us to bring about such a relationship, it is going to be along that same road. If you and I want even to approximate relationship, this supreme relationship to God, if our hearts respond to this suggestion and proposition that God should be able to speak of us as His friends, then look at what it means. It means absolute and unreserved committal for life, and with life, to God, without reserves and without alternatives. Abraham *had* no alternative and *needed* no alternative. None of us would claim to have reached this point. Nevertheless, this is what God is working toward."

Abraham is someone God presented to us numerous times throughout the Bible as a man who exemplifies what the Lord is looking for in His people.

But please keep in mind that even though we need to keep his example before us, as we do Paul and others, it is quite possible that most of us will not advance as far as Abraham did before we leave here.

I'm not saying we should not press forward with the faith of Abraham in mind, I'm just saying that we should not be discouraged if we feel, as Robert Frost put it,

"The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep."

Both David and Abraham are held up as two who represent the ideal of spiritual maturity, but both have extremely checkered pasts filled with unbelief and failure.

Here's how David Wilkerson puts it; he's commenting on the parable of the prodigal son,

"Forgiveness is not the main issue in this parable. In fact, Jesus makes it clear that it wasn't enough for this prodigal merely to be forgiven. There needed

to be restoration. The father didn't embrace his son to forgive him and then let him go his way. No, that father yearned for his child's company and communion. Even though the prodigal was forgiven and in favor once more, he still wasn't settled in his father's house. Only then would the father be satisfied, his joy fulfilled, when his son was brought into his company. That is the issue in this parable.

Here the story gets very interesting. Note how the father responds to his son. He utters not a single word of reproof. There is no reference to the prodigal's rebellion, foolishness and spiritual bankruptcy. In fact, the father didn't even acknowledge his son's attempts to stay outside. Why?

In the father's eyes, the old boy was dead. That son was out of his thoughts completely. This son who had returned home was a new man, and his past would never be brought up."

The Lord looks at the heart and sees the end from the beginning. Our past is not the issue; we are told to forget those things which are behind. That's not easy, but it's extremely liberating when we pull it off.

Abraham and David weren't honored because of their past; they were honored because they never gave up. It's our momentum, our spiritual advance, that matters, not our past or seasons of being prodigals.

Listen to these comments on Hudson Taylor's life,

"After having been in China, away from his country and from his wife, for a long time, he came home and his wife met him at the ship. They got into a conveyance together, and, of course, you would have thought that at once he or she would engage in extensive conversation on all that had happened during the years they were apart. But they took that journey in absolute silence - and neither was offended! Not one word passed between them, but that was the deep, deep understanding of true fellowship. Oh, for something like that with the Lord! He is silent, and that silence is a most testing thing to us. Why does He not speak? Why does He not act? Why

does He not *do* something? He is silent and inactive, and seems to be indifferent. To trust Him *then* is the substance of true friendship.”

I’m sure It’s obvious to all of us by now, that God arranges the circumstances of our lives, not just to move us forward, but also to allow us to discover where are hearts really are in relation to faith in the Lord.

And it’s heartbreaking to us to watch what we do when severe tests and decades of having to wait on the Lord come to us.

But, remember, Abraham failed a thousand tests before Isaac.

The development of faith through trials creates a certain kind of people. They become crucified people with a single, undivided focus on the Lord in everything.

I’m going to read a brief quote from an article entitled, “Inward and Spiritual Circumcision” to help explain this;

“The reasoning of the natural life, or the self-life - the willing of the self-life, the desiring of the self-life – is being cut off by the Spirit’s application of the Cross of the Lord Jesus. Every expression and aspect of the self-life must be cut through by the Cross and put in the place where the door is shut. There is no open door to any expression of the natural life. The Cross says, 'The door is closed; death rests upon that'. That is spiritual circumcision.”

That’s both a painful and mysterious operation of the Holy Spirit in us. But we have to let Him finish this so we can be free from ourselves and from the unbelief the self-life generates in us.

Over the course of our lives, the Cross is applied to everything we are connected to that competes with God. He’s delivering us from the domination of self in us.

We are told in the Gospels that to find our lives, we must lose our lives. And most of us want that, but we need help getting there. God knows this is what we want, and He’s making it happen.

Abraham said, basically, ‘Lord, I am with You in this; if you have to take me down and bury me in order to raise me up, I trust You.’ I don’t understand *anything* You’re doing, but I know it has to be perfect because it’s coming from You.

I’m not going to tangent off on a discussion of Job, except to say that Job expressed an *extremely* advanced level of trust in *the God of the unknown*.

What we *are* able to see in reading Job’s story is that there’s an invisible war going on all around us; and that God is very interested in showing the players in that war what happens when our faith is combined with His wisdom and His love for us.

(Eph. 3:9-11) “. . . to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord . . . “

So, of course, the enemy will do anything he can to prevent you and I from being a vessel showing the wisdom of God to the unseen world. And faith is always his target because, in a sense, it’s faith that allows God to *be* God in our lives. Our fight against the enemy is a fight of faith.

As the principalities and powers that we wrestle with examine us, accuse us, attack us, God is often silent – allowing us to determine by faith what we will do, what stand we will take.

When we come out on His side against intense pressure and impossible odds, with a Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego attitude, God is glorified, we increase in our spiritual growth and the enemy is driven away.

(Jas. 4:7) “Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

(1 Pet. 5:8-9) “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, *steadfast*

in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brothers in the world.”

It's not just about us and our 'refinement'; it's about a battle in the heavens that has been going on for thousands of years.

Our lives are *not* insignificant.

Satan's greatest fear in regard to the Christian's spiritual life, is that the Christian would move into a 'friendship' relationship with God.

Now, look at the outcome of Abraham's trust.

(Gen. 22:15-18) “Then the Angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said: “By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son— blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.”

It's the pure simplicity of friendship. The Lord was saying, 'because you let me take you beyond your ability and then appear to take Isaac away from you, I am going to shower you with honor and glory.

The trust of a human friend in a Divine Friend forms the basis of a life of faith. Not faith in us or faith in faith - but faith in God.

We have no idea what God will use to bring us to the same place as Abraham. And we don't have to know, because our faith isn't in His means or processes; our faith is in Him.

We determine to go on with Him regardless of how confused we are (just like Abraham did).

And that determination is the basis of friendship.

We all know what it's like to grab a promise in the Bible and then try to help God make it happen. Trusting God to do what He promised is *different* than helping Him.

And we know what happened after Abraham received *his* promise, and then tried to help the Lord make it happen.

Ishmael happened – and that was followed by thousands of years of the formation and growth of the Arab nations and their hostility to God's people.

Abraham was faithful and he became the friend of God, but it took a long time and there were times of failure scattered throughout his life – just like us.

I want to take a minute to look at the opposite of Abraham.

I going to read something that shows what Stephen was up against. It's related to those who *don't* want to lose their lives, who *don't* want to trust God. Seeing the inner life of Stephen's audience can help us contrast that with what we've seen in Abraham;

“Stephen, in that matchless discourse of his which resulted in his murder, cried at one point to those who were persecuting and about to stone him, ‘You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart’ (Acts 7:51). What did he mean by ‘uncircumcised in heart and ears’? He just meant this, that they were only willing to have what they wanted and nothing more.”

It's the temptation that comes to us of settling for something less than what the Lord has called us to.

‘Settling’ is not just ‘settling’ – it's a rejection of our calling and of His desire for us.

(John 15:13-15) expands on the principle of friendship;

“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father.”

Now, this is from a commentary on these verses,

“It is indeed a very wonderful and beautiful thing that the Son of God called such as the disciples were, and such as we are, His friends. I do not think there is a greater or more beautiful word in all our language than that word 'friend'. It is the most intimate title in all human relationships. Every other relationship that we can think of may exist without this. Perhaps we think that the marriage relationship is the most intimate, but it is possible for that relationship to exist without friendship. Happy indeed is the man whose wife is his friend, and happy is the wife whose husband is her friend. We may admire a person and have a lot of association with them: we may think that we know them and could say: 'Well, I know so-and-so very well', but, even so, there may not be friendship. Friendship is always just that something extra.

“When Jesus said: "You are my friends", He was going beyond 'You are My disciples' and 'You are My followers'. He could have called them by many other names, but when He said: "You are my friends" He went beyond anything else. And I think that the Lord Jesus found the most complete satisfaction of His heart in this word. To say "You are my friends" was as far as anybody could possibly go. Really, there is nothing beyond it. You reach the end of all relationships when you really come to friendship. How rich and how precious, then, is this title!

“That is just a little about friendship. But what is the nature of friendship? We have it here in John 15: ‘No longer do I call you servants, for the servant knows not what his Lord does, but I have called you friends: for all things that I heard from my Father I have made known unto you.’ Friendship is that

position which makes it possible to open the heart fully, to keep nothing back; and to have such confidence that you can trust the other person with all that is in your heart. Jesus said: 'All that the Father has shown Me I have shown you. I have kept nothing back from you. I have put perfect confidence in you. I have had no suspicions of you and have not been afraid to say just what was in My heart.'

I need to make one comment about the phrase, "If you do what I command you."

In the realm of human relationships, putting a condition like this on a friendship would be the end of that friendship.

But as we've seen a thousand times, Jesus is not like other men.

First, He never does or says anything from a selfish motive. Telling us to do what He commands is not Him demanding His own way.

And second, unlike everyone else, He knows all about us. He knows what would be in our best interest when we wouldn't have a clue, and would probably move in the wrong direction in nearly every decision we make.

And finally, the Cross is all the evidence we need to know that whatever He asks of us is coming from the omniscience of God and from a heart of unending love.

So, for all those reasons, the bottom-line is that it would be self-defeating *not* to obey Him.

But some have the attitude shared in this summation of the John 15 commentary;

"Why do I have to stop doing this? Is there *really* any harm in it? A lot of other people do it, so why shouldn't I be able to do it? I even know *Christians* who do it. What can't I? Friendship puts all that kind of thing aside and never talks about 'do I have to?' There are many ways we're asked to lay down our life. And it doesn't matter what it costs, or how painful it is - friendship makes it possible."

Abraham entered into the heart of God and counted nothing too precious for friendship with Him.

God so loved us that He gave us His son; Abraham so trusted God, that he gave Him *his* son. That's the reciprocity of friendship.

As Sparks wrote,

"The greatest characteristic of friendship is loyalty. I do not think there is a greater or grander virtue than loyalty. You may not always understand your best friend; he or she may sometimes do things that you cannot understand, things about which you do not feel very happy at the moment, but if it is friendship, you are loyal to your friend, whether you understand him or not. You will not betray your friend. You will always be loyal. Faithfulness is the heart of friendship."

I'm going close with three final quotes, (and I actually know who wrote these:) The first is J.B. Stoney, the second is F.B. Meyer and the third is J. Sidlow Baxter.

J.B. Stoney

"Do not be satisfied with only as much Christianity as will ease your conscience. Give the Lord all you are and you will receive back a thousand-fold."

F.B. Meyer

"We have all cherished our purposes and plans. We have forecast our futures as likely to lie in a certain direction and have dearly desired that it should be so. When hindrances have been put in our way, we have still clung to our hope. Only very slowly, perhaps nearly a lifetime, have we yielded and accepted the inevitable. To renounce our dreams has been like tearing out our heart. Not till long years have passed have we realized that the Lord's plan was much wiser and grander than our own. Then we have awakened to discover that while we were desiring to do one thing, God was leading us to do another, and that what we counted as secondary, God

counted as primary, and for the lasting satisfaction of our own heart. . . God has a purpose in every life, and when the soul is yielded and acquiescent, He will certainly realize it. Blessed is he who has never thwarted the working of the divine ideal. Is there not comfort in knowing that your vessel is caught by a current that emanated from the purpose of Him who works all things after the counsel of His own will and is bearing you toward His heart?"

And finally, J. Sidlow Baxter

"The Cross is a culmination of union. Once we are Christ's, the Cross is meant to become something to us subjectively, that is, to induce something inwardly experiential. It is in this subjective, inward, experiential sense that the Cross is a culmination in our fellowship with the Lord – a culmination in the outcome of our union with Christ. First, we are born into newness of life. Second, we share His life having become new creations in Him. Third, in virtue of that, we are meant to take all that we are now to the place of utter surrender, and allow the nails to crucify all that is of egoistic selfism. Going to the Cross in *that* sense is indeed a spiritual culmination which leads to a (friendship) with Him which is the very borderland of heaven."