

Text: Genesis 14

Theme: Abraham in Tests of Success/Plunder and Worship

Sermon delivered by Reverend Dele Agbelusi during Holy Communion Service on 27/09/2015 at 10.30am

One of the challenges of venturing into the Old Testament comes in a passage like ours this morning. It's the sort of reading that strikes fear in the heart and a twist in the tongue of whoever has been allocated it to read. A list of unheard of and unpronounceable names, people we might only hear about once in the whole Bible. Why would we want to bother reading about Chedorlaomer or Shemeber?

It might transport you back to your history classes at school, when you heard of kings from over a thousand years ago. At least those kings could be pronounced easier. What could Genesis 14 teach us?

We want to be a church family that takes Jesus' words seriously. In Luke 24:44 Jesus says that 'everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled.' The whole of the Old Testament in many ways is all about Jesus. So, that means that Genesis 14 will, in some way, point us to Jesus as well. Yet it comes in a way you wouldn't expect. It's a blink and you might miss its type of signpost. And it comes in one of those hard to pronounce proper names, as we'll see.

I want to draw your attention to a word in the English language that we hear used from time to time. Yet, this is a word that we rarely see modelled in our day. That word is the word "**Integrity.**" It means the following: "**possession of firm principles: the quality of possessing and steadfastly adhering to high moral principles or professional standards**"

This is the behaviour that is modelled by Abram in this passage. **Genesis 14** is a glimpse inside the life of this great man of God. There are two areas of his life that are dealt with in this passage. 1. Abraham's test in success and plunder. 2. Abraham's test in worship. In each of these, Abram demonstrates the fact that he is a man of integrity. Let's examine these areas this morning so that we too may learn how to become men and women of integrity for the glory of the Lord.

1) Verses 1-17, 21-24: Test of success and plunder–Abram's integrity in success and plunder.

The wars of nations make great figure in history, but we should not have had the record of this war if Abram and Lot had not been concerned. Out of covetousness, Lot had settled in fruitful, but wicked Sodom. Its inhabitants were the most ripe for vengeance of all the descendants of Canaan. The invaders were from Chaldea and Persia, then only small kingdoms. They took Lot among the rest, and his goods. Though he was righteous, and Abram's brother's son, yet he was with the rest in this trouble. Neither our own piety, nor our relation to the favourites of Heaven, will be our security when God's judgments are abroad.

The Bible makes it clear that faith that has no effect on the way we do relationships is not true faith at all. As we continue to think about our own faith trek in the light of Abraham's life, we already know that doubt and scheming profoundly damaged Abraham's relationships, allowing him to live it up while his wife was left in the oppressive shadows of that Egyptian harem. Now as scheming Lot gets himself in trouble and is carried off as captive, we see the principle at work in reverse. Abraham has rebuilt his altar and is calling on the name of the Lord once more. The fruit of that restored faith is that, at huge personal risk, he goes on the warpath to rescue his contentious relative. Even though the two had parted with some tension, Abram leaps into action.

We see a new Abraham, unafraid that he could die in the hands of a powerful ruler who had taken captive over three kingdoms! His faith in the Lord has grown and this faith makes him think of the need of others even the ones that had treated him badly above his own! Isn't that what God's grace in Jesus does to us? Genuine encounters with Jesus must lead to a transformation.

When Jesus meets Peter, the one who talks before he thinks, his Spirit changed him to Peter the rock, the assumed leader of the early church. When Jesus encountered Saul who was a persecutor of Christians, he was transformed to Paul who was willing to give his very life for the sake of the gospel and Jesus Christ. When the thief on the right hand side of Jesus at His crucifixion responded to the Word of life, He confessed Jesus, accepted his guilt and desired paradise with Jesus. When Jesus met me, he did something beautiful, in my life. My encounter with Jesus is the greatest and best thing that happened to me. He changed my view of life and I learn more and more things from Him and His Word daily on how He can model Himself through me. Do you have a testimony of how Jesus has changed your life? You cannot encounter Jesus and remain the same!

We can't profess to love God and hate our brother, insists the apostle John. James blasts a hole in the notion that faith can exist without good works shared. Perhaps it is time to demonstrate true faith by being gracious, kind and even self-sacrificing towards that person who is gifted at irritating you.

Without doubt one of the greatest tests of faith is time of war. We can say all sorts of things when life is going along well, but when our world is falling apart, when the bullets are flying, then who we really are trusting in comes to the fore.

In this passage, the king of Shinar, Amraphel, Arioch of Ellasar, Kedorlaomer king of Elam and Tidal king of Goiim are taking on the kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim and Bela. For so long, the second group had served Kedorlaomer, but now they decide to rebel and stop paying the international equivalent of council tax. So Kedorlaomer comes, clobbers them and carries off a whole lot of Sodom's material wealth and people including Lot.

We now can confirm that moving into the so called secure plains and cities was not such a good idea after all. But again, our faithlessness does not nullify God's faithfulness, and Abram comes to the rescue, or rather *God* uses Abram to rescue as we see in v20 'It is God Most High who has delivered his enemies into Abram's hands.

Abraham wins the victory and brings back the goods and everything that had been taken. The rescuer returns. We see that in verse 17. As he returns, the King of Sodom goes out to meet Abram. His conversation is found in verses 21-24.

The King of Sodom is a reflection of many people, cool and surly. See v 21 'Give me the people and keep the goods yourself' how bossy can you get? Indeed, how ungrateful can you get? After all it is Abram who rescued the people of Sodom, not the King, and not that they deserved any of it, but that is again a reflection in this man of the character of the God he serves, he is a God of grace. He is far more patient with us than we are mindful of him. And remember the warning which went with the promise of chapter 12, God said to Abram 'Whoever *disdains* you I will curse.' Well, this comes pretty close to disdaining as anything I know. But still, Abram responds in generosity giving him not only the people but the booty as well.

Abram refuses to take any reward - not even a thread, not even a sandal-thong (a shoe lace) - 'so that you might not say, "I have made Abram rich"' Abram is holding on to God's promise of descendants and land and blessing. That's all he needs. And so that the glory goes to God; he refuses to take anything from Sodom. You can imagine the king of Sodom in later years: 'Ah yes, that Abram is all rich now. I remember when he had nothing. You know, I started him

off. I gave him his first break. He would still be nothing if it wasn't for me!" But the glory is God's. The rescuer returns. One King, Melchizedek responds in faith and the other lives by sight and all the grasping acquisitiveness which goes with it.

2) Test of worship Verses 18-20 – Abraham's integrity in worship.

I wonder if you noticed something strange when we were reading earlier on. Look at verse 17. The king of Sodom went out to meet Abram. You expect him to speak, to say something, but before he does, this other mysterious king appears and speaks instead. When you look at it closer, we could probably do without verses 18-20. The king of Sodom comes out in verse 17, and he speaks in verse 21. You could seamlessly move from 17 to 21. But why are verses 18-20 there? Why do we need to deal with Melchizedek? Let's see what we're told first. He's king of Salem. He brings out bread and wine. He is priest of God Most High. He blesses Abram, and Abram gives him a tenth, a tithe.

If this was the only reference to Melchizedek, we could lump him with the other kings from the royal rumble. Interesting, but not particularly helpful. It's as if Melchizedek drifts in and out of the text in these three verses.

The next time he is mentioned comes in Psalm 110, a psalm written by King David. The Lord is speaking to David's Lord - King Jesus. In verse 4, the king is given another role. 'The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek."' Again, the only person who fits that role is Jesus Christ.

There's something about this mysterious Melchizedek that shows us what the true King of God's people will be like. But nothing more is said in the Old Testament. A couple of strange references. It's only in the letter to the Hebrews that the light fully comes on. Here, the Spirit-inspired writer gives us the commentary on who Melchizedek is, and why he matters. Unlike everyone else in Genesis, there is no genealogy for Melchizedek. We're not told of his parents; we're not told that he died. It appears that he lives for ever. 'But resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest for ever.'

Melchizedek, the king and priest, points us to Jesus, the Priest King. We think regularly of how Jesus is King Jesus, the one who reigns. But Jesus is also the Priest King. The King is our priest, the one who makes sacrifice for us, the one who prays for us, the one who has already entered into heaven on our behalf.

After Abram's victory, Melchizedek brings bread and wine. Some reckon that this is what a returning soldier needs - some food and drink to keep him going. But others see in these gifts a pointer to the Lord's Supper.

Melchizedek the priest king speaks out God's blessing on Abram: 'Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!' Abram, you're blessed, not because of what you have achieved, but simply because God has given you the victory. God has been gracious to you, given you what you didn't deserve. It's then that Abram responds by giving the tenth - recognising that everything he has comes from God's hand. It all belongs to God.

That is the principle of the Tithe. You give a tenth in appreciation that all that you have and all that you are come from the Lord. You are acknowledging God's generosity to you in everything.

Conclusion

As we look at this character, Melchizedek, we find that he shows us what Jesus is like. Jesus the priest king, who sustains us for the journey. Jesus the priest king, who declares God's blessing. Jesus the priest king, who receives our response.

Is this the great high priest you need to know about today? You have a great high priest who has entered the most holy place, who constantly lives to intercede for you. Your burdens are his burdens. Your concerns are his concerns. He lives to pray for you right now. Every moment of every day. When you sleep, or when you toss and turn. Know that Jesus is praying for you. And know that where Jesus is, is where we will be. He is already in God's holy place. His presence there, sacrifice completed, is our hope - hope like an anchor which is grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love. We can hold firm to God's promise, because he is holding us firm.