

Text: Genesis 12:10-20

Theme: Abraham in Test of Poverty

Sermon delivered by Revd Canon Dele Agbelusi during Service of the Word on 13/09/2015 at 10:30 am

Earlier in this chapter, we encountered Abram taking a great leap of faith by leaving his settled environment to a place where God promised to give him. Besides his personal belongings, the greatest thing he held on to was God's Word. As he heads out not knowing where he was going, God appeared to him to confirm his presence. And there in Bethel, he erected an altar and worshipped God. He demonstrated his faith in God that his life was not just a series of chances but that God was with him. **So what has happened to this man of faith that when famine stared him at his face his feet gave way?** His problem had loomed so large that he did not consider God as a factor in his life. When we focus too much on our circumstances and too little on God, we allow ourselves to be consumed by our faithless thoughts.

If you remember the story of Peter in Matthew 14:28-29: Peter asked. "If it is, tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," Jesus said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. **But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"** As long as Peter's eyes were fixed on Jesus, he was able to walk on water as on dry ground. But the moment he took his eyes away from Jesus, saw the waves and the wind around him he started thinking that he would sink because that is the natural thing when walking on water. So he began to sink. Not until he cried out to Jesus to help him was he saved from sinking.

Coming back to Abram's situation, most people in those days would head for a place of refuge nearby in the event of famine – and Egypt was the most popular place because of the Nile which made the land less susceptible to famine.

And so Abraham, despite being assured by God that He will take care of him, simply did what everyone else did. But he was not 'everyone' – he was a called out one with the promise of God's presence.

We, as Christians too have been called to a radically different mind-set, to choose faith over worry, trust over fear, generosity over selfishness, faithfulness over fickleness.

- How I wish that faith is an attitude we could permanently set on a cruise control in our lives – Just a one-time choice which will be good whatever life throws at us. But it is not so. Our faith will be tested and refined in order to bring the best out of us. **Spiritual growth is God moving you towards the best version of yourself.**
- Abraham had boldly built altars in the presence of the Canaanites, declaring his faith in the One true God. How sad that fear and selfishness have set in. **Yesterday's stories of faith might encourage us to trust today, but they don't guarantee it. God calls us to walk with him on a day-to-day basis.**

Abram was filled with confidence in God when in Canaan but as he gets to Egypt, faith and confidence gave way to doubt and fear.

Abraham instructed Sarai to participate with him in the deception that she was his sister rather than his wife. He placed her in a vulnerable position to the advances of other men, especially as she could be killed if found out by an angry rejected suitor.

Look at Abraham's language which is telling! "I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you." Me, me and me. How selfish.

He allowed the concerns for his future and his property to create fear in his life and made a decision which could hurt others. How many times have we done a similar thing? He took

one step of independence from God by fleeing to Egypt and that led to the second step of concocting a lie to save his skin. **We do not tend to rush into sin, we gradually slide into it – one step at a time.** Before long, we are habitually ignoring the purposes of God in our lives. Where is the faith that we associated with Abraham when he took God at His Word and left his land for an unknown place.

V. 11-15

Fear of man is a snare (Proverbs 29:25)–apparently, even for Abram the father of faith. Based on speculation that the Egyptians had intentions of stealing Sarai and killing Abram, Abram told a half-truth about his half-sister. What if Abram had told Pharaoh the complete truth about his relationship with Sarai? How much better would that have been? **Imagining what others are thinking and feeling is one of the chief causes of sin.** It was that way for Abram and it's that way today for you and for me. How many sins are caused by our imaginings? Abram imagined that the Egyptians would kill him if they knew that Sarai was his wife. A man imagines that his co-worker would throw him under the bus to advance his career. A daughter-in-law imagines that her husband's mother thinks she's not worthy of her son.

When we are presented with a disastrous moral choice it is not hard to excuse ourselves. Abraham could have argued and convinced himself that he needed to keep himself safe in order to ensure that God's promise was fulfilled – or protest that he had spoken half-truth because Sarai was his half-sister! But all these will not wash. Jesus did not succumb to the opportunity of making a deal with Satan in the wilderness of temptation. Beware of rationalising what is wrong as their outcomes are usually disastrous – and not limited to us alone as others are affected.

V.16

Let us be careful **“Every Blessing is not blessing indeed”** Abraham suddenly became wealthy and successful as Pharaoh was so delighted with his new acquisition, that he showered his supposed brother – in – law with gifts. Just because a person is rich does not mean their source of wealth is God. The gains may be ill-gotten. Let us ask God to provide for us and bless us as we work hard and refuse dishonest gain.

How do you think Abraham felt as he looks at his new found wealth while not knowing what was happening to his wife in Pharaoh's harem. He must have endured sleepless nights in the land of plenty and there was nothing he could do. To go to Pharaoh and own up would have meant death to the two of them and possibly the rest of his entourage! Had it not been for our faithful God, the **I am who I am**, the God of the impossible who intervened, Abraham and his wife would have lived the rest of their lives in misery. But God did act in a supernatural way.

V.17-20. Unmerited intervention of God- Grace in action

It was an unmerited act of intervention. Pharaoh was judged because he took Sarai as one of his wives-in spite of the fact that he was not aware he was in relationship with another man's wife. God was determined to keep his promise to Abraham in spite of his failure.

Can we see a picture of Christ's intervention to save us from a headlong speed to destruction? God intervened on our behalf because of his love for us and because he wants to make us his own. We are undeserving of his love from whatever angle you look at it. That is Grace – God's grace.

Abraham has no defence for his actions. He was kicked out of Egypt, a shamed man. The giant of faith has become a schemer, a disgrace. But God has not rejected him. Although his reputation is in tatters God's hands are outstretched to embrace him, and protect him. Pharaoh could have killed them but God prevented him. He said: “Here, wife,

take, go” in Hebrew – 4 words. He must have realised some divine power was at work here. Does this happen without consequence? Surely God’s grace is in play here as evidenced by how Sarai and Abram are spared and sent away with riches. But though it may appear on the surface that Abram’s sin is without consequence, **we should remember that one of the maidservants that Abram leaves with is an Egyptian girl named Hagar. A girl who we’ll later see, break Abram’s heart and divide his family.**

How faithful our God is – How merciful! His faithfulness is not cancelled by our errors and sins. Are you fallen down, in despair and flushed with shame, get up and walk with God into another day – a better day.