

NSW Bible School

The Covenant of Sonship

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I'm going to look at two of Abraham's encounters with the Lord, during which the Lord came to him displaying a different face of His administration (Ezekiel 1:4-10; Revelation 4:5-7): the face of the Man, proclaiming the covenant of sonship, and the face of the Eagle, proclaiming the Fatherhood of God.

Abram's third meeting with God

We are beginning to understand in quite a fresh way God's proclamation to Abraham in their third encounter:

"...the word of the Lord came to Abram¹ in a vision, saying, "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great."

(Genesis 15:1)

God was coming to him as teacher of His covenant, just as He was to his disciples, saying:

"Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me..."

(Matthew 11:29)

Jesus said this because He is teaching us. We're not going to learn anything if we won't be taught. If any of us believes that Jesus is our Saviour, and that belief becomes our established 'position' that none can gainsay, then we will resist being taught by Him. This was Peter's problem. Even though he was an apostle, perhaps *especially* because he was an apostle, Jesus told Peter he'd have to be yoked to Him and learn.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go." (John 21:18)

When the Lord spoke to Abraham in the vision we're looking at, He ministered to his humanity, to the man, coming to him and saying, 'You are very afraid and you're not in a good way'. When you and I are afraid, we're not in a good way either.

Do not be afraid

The Lord wouldn't have said that if Abraham's fear was only some minor thing like being afraid of the dark. The problem was that Abraham's fear was driving his actions and behaviour. That is how people end up with depression, unable to control things that are running out of control. Abraham knew he couldn't fulfil what had been attributed to him by Melchizedek, King of Salem and priest of God Most High, who

¹ God later changed Abram's name to Abraham.

had called him ‘possessor of Heaven and earth’ (Genesis 14:19). So, the Lord came to Abraham, speaking to his humanity to strengthen him and deliver him from his fear and anxiety.

How we need the Lord to do that! Until He delivers us, we fear death, loss and all the things we don’t want to happen but that we know *could* happen. Whether our fears are in the forefront, middle or back of our minds, they register.

Abraham’s fears registered. He knew he couldn’t fulfil Melchizedek’s prophecy about him. The Lord had brought him to know that he was bankrupt in spirit, and that the attempt and arrogant presumption that he *could* do things as the Lord had said was sinful.

When the Lord speaks, the flesh of mankind says, ‘Everything You have said we will do’ (Exodus 19:8, 24:3). ‘I hear the Gospel and I’m making my commitment’; ‘I hear the need and I’m answering it’; ‘I see my sin and I’m stopping it’. But try as we might, a few months later nothing’s really changed, and we may even be in a worse condition than we were before. It can’t be done that way! We’ve got to come to bankruptcy in spirit. ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit’ (Matthew 5:3). Abraham had to come to that point too, so that God could begin to work on him.

Now, we’ve all heard this before, and we think we know it, but the Lord keeps speaking to us about this because we *don’t* know it. We haven’t understood the Gospel; we haven’t understood that our own death in Christ’s death is being proclaimed at the Communion table. We’re still trying hard to do the right thing, but that was Peter’s self-righteous condition. It’s iniquitous and it leads us away and into difficulty; it leads us, as it did Peter, to oppose the cross.

The Lord wants to deliver us from this, but His deliverance requires that we register and recognise our condition and our need. Don’t forget that the measure of eternal life is not the seed that’s planted, it’s the *fruit* the planted seed produces.

“...you will know them by their fruits”. (Matthew 7:16-20)

The parable of the sower shows us that Jesus is after the fruit of righteousness (Matthew 13:3-23; Mark 4:3-20; Luke 8:5-15). Those who receive seed and, seeking to establish their own righteousness, do their own religious works with it do not produce the fruit of righteousness. They produce fruit that God does not want.

This is why the name God has given us is so important. We are not to be mere persons, identities, who read the Bible, hear the Gospel, then try to produce a form of righteousness that fits our own idea of what righteousness looks like. Instead, when we recognise that we really *are* bankrupt in spirit, God can lay hold of us and we can truly see.

That is why we have to drill right down to understand what God is saying to us. Otherwise we’re just going to continue doing what we’ve always done, living the way we do. And what is the fruit of what you and I are doing? What are the results?

We are not victims of the results of our actions or sufferings. Was Jesus a victim? As soon as you position yourself as a victim of your sufferings, you lose hold of the provision of God for you *in* those sufferings. That’s what happened to Abraham as he tried to do God’s will and found he was only depressed and not doing very well. We can get a little bit ‘narky’ after God speaks to us; after we’ve tried very hard to make things work the way we thought they would but to no avail. ‘I tried, but it didn’t

work'; 'I'm trying but it's not working'. Some people even say they've tried God and *He* didn't work. When we do that, what we're really doing is operating by our flesh and concluding that because our efforts didn't achieve what we wanted, God's word and even God Himself are useless. This puts us on *very* bad ground indeed!

I am your shield

Having ministered to deliver Abraham from his fears and bring him to bankruptcy in spirit, the word of Yahweh could now say to him, 'I am your shield', and Abraham could receive the faith that God had for him. He could receive God as his shield of faith.

In this interaction with Abraham, don't picture God coming in white robes and speaking in an unearthly voice the way Hollywood might portray. For how does faith work? By love (Galatians 5:6). This interaction is God loving Abraham; being a better Friend to him than any friend you can imagine. And in His love, He is not just giving Abraham a set of principles to remember and take home to try and live by. God is coming to him in relationship, in fellowship, assuring him, 'You don't have to be afraid'.

Why do we become unhappy and disaffected? Because we keep trying in our own flesh to serve God, and all we feel is condemnation. 'I've tried to be a good father and head for my family; I've tried to be a good mother; I've tried to be a good child; a good teenager; a good young adult'. We've tried, but we keep coming under the weight of condemnation and consequent depression. God is saying to us, 'Don't be afraid. I want to remove your fear and I want you to be My son.'

Giving people tips and telling them not to be afraid when they are afraid doesn't work, and

that's not what God does. When He says, 'Do not fear', He who does not fear offers us His own capacity of not being fearful so that we too do not fear. That's the power that's in His word.

Can you see the relational dimension that's here? When God said to Abraham, 'I am your shield', God's faith working by His love was being given to Abraham. Jesus is the author and perfecter of all faith (Hebrews 12:2), and the life we now live is by the faith of the Son of God who gave Himself for us by offering (Galatians 2:20).

It's *all* by offering! Our participation in the Covenant of sonship is by our participation in the offering of the Son.

I am your reward

Having ministered to deliver Abraham from fear to faith, God then said to him, 'I am your reward; your exceedingly abundant reward'. This reward is more than just a reward that is very big - it is the very life of God.

What did Jesus say He had come to do?

"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10:10).

He is the reward! The reward is His life.

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life;" (John 14:6)

"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." (John 1:4)

Jesus is our reward, and His Divine nature in us and covenant with us, are established through offering. Our reward is not some ethereal future that has us all floating along on clouds or walking down yellow brick roads up in heaven.

God speaking, 'Do not fear' ministered to Abraham's humanity, bringing him to bankruptcy of spirit. God's love and faith proclaiming, 'I am your shield' brought His faith

to Abraham so he could do what God was asking of him, and God's own life was being given to Abraham as his reward.

Having received all the promises from the word of Yahweh the Teacher, or as we might say, having been washed by the water of the word, Abraham had some matters of his heart dealt with and had been brought back to reality and perspective. Not only was wisdom coming to him, but also understanding. The wisdom of God is the cross (1 Corinthians 18:18-24), but Abraham also needed God's understanding.

"...with all your acquiring [of wisdom], get understanding." (Proverbs 4:7)

Running off with the wisdom of God without understanding trips a lot of people up and produces strange results. Abraham sought understanding:

"He said, "O Lord God, how may I know that I will inherit it?" (Genesis 15:8)

In asking this question, Abraham wasn't interrogating God, asking for proof so he could believe. He was wanting to understand and participate by faith in what the Lord was illuminating to him. He was asking the Lord for further illumination: 'How do I do this? I'm bankrupt in spirit, but You've given me a faith, and I understand now that You are my life, but what do I do now, and how do I participate?'

In the fellowship of Christ's offering

In answer, the Lord revealed to Abraham that all His covenant promises would be inherited by participating in the fellowship of Christ's offering (Genesis 15:9-21). God instructed Abraham to make a prescribed offering that included three animals, which Abraham cut in half, making six pieces. In Scripture, the number six represents man. The issues of man's flesh were being laid out and addressed

in this offering. God then came to the offering with a smoking furnace and a burning lamp.

This matter of God dealing with our flesh is very important for each of us as we proceed forward in the faith of a son of God. God has set Himself to deal with our flesh through our participation as living sacrifices in the offering of Christ, *the living sacrifice* (Romans 12:1). Our offering of ourselves in this way causes a sweet and pleasing aroma to God. Jesus approached Gethsemane as a whole burnt offering coming from the life of Yahweh. *Our* life can't offer that way, and God doesn't want that. He wants our participation in Christ. Our offering can be made in no other way that is acceptable to Him.

We must be joined to the body of Christ, the body in which the will of God is being done (Hebrews 10:5-7). That's what Jesus prayed in the Garden: 'Not my will, but Yours be done' (Luke 22:42). He prayed that prayer for us so that with Him we can now pray, 'Not my will'. He knows we have no capacity in our flesh to pray that, or obey that. But joined to Him, in the first wounding of Christ in Gethsemane, we can be delivered from our utter incapacity to obey Him and delivered to His miraculous obedience. By His obedience, we *can* do the will of God. Right there, as we are joined to His offering, the grace of God is unlocked to us. Hallelujah!

The Lord's fire on acceptable offering

On Abraham's offering, a smoking furnace and a burning lamp came (Genesis 15:17). When we're participating in the offering of Christ, what is the burning lamp doing? It's illuminating the issues of our heart. Light is coming. If you've ever been shown by the Lord what you really are, you will have been desperate for Him to come back and rescue you, because you have no way of rescuing yourself. Abraham had to endure a great horror of darkness until the word of the Lord returned and made Covenant

with him in the fellowship of offering. The darkness persisted until the Covenant was ratified and the smoking furnace and burning lamp passed between the pieces of the sacrifice. The smoking furnace came to ignite Abraham's sacrifice to make it an acceptable offering.

The Lord's fire is the only fire that's acceptable to God. If it's our fire or any other, it's strange fire and unacceptable to Him (Leviticus 10:1). We can do nothing to make it acceptable - we must wait on God to answer the matter. A lot of things go 'pear-shaped' and we find all kinds of trouble when we don't wait for God to answer with *His* fire but start igniting things ourselves. The burning lamp came to inspect Abraham's sacrifice and his heart, and as it passed between the pieces of the sacrifice, the eyes of Christ searched the depths of his heart and brought illumination to him. How we need The Lord's searching and illumination! But we can only receive these if we're in fellowship, now, with the word of Yahweh, now.

This was Peter's situation. He'd been washed by the water of the word (John 13:5-11). He'd let Christ wash his feet, so that even though he went 'off the reservation' for a while, the Lord could bring him back. He could be converted and brought into submission.

Judas, however, would not be washed and so was not a participant with Christ. If the word of the Lord means nothing to you, or it just washes over the top of you, you're going to have all kinds of trouble because that's where the faith for today comes to us: in the word of God as it comes. The word of Yahweh has been given to us as a gift; as grace.

Abram's fourth meeting with God

When God appeared to Abraham the fourth time, He appeared as God Almighty, El Shaddai. Abraham was a sprightly ninety-nine-year-old when the inheritance of sonship was revealed to him from this fourth Eagle aspect of Christ's face². The face of the Eagle is associated with the multiplication of God's life towards others.

"...the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am Almighty God;" (Genesis 17:1)

The Lord revealed Himself to Abraham in this aspect only *after* His revelation of Himself in the first three aspects or faces: Lion (apostle), Ox (prophet-priest) and Man (teacher), because unless Abraham was first established in his name, he could be of no help in or beyond his family. There would be trouble instead of blessing.

The same is true for us. The grace of God will be obstructed in our homes where dysfunction between husbands and wives in name, expression and work become habitual. For example, when a woman takes the authority over the home, or when a man gives it away to her, all kinds of trouble develops. If a woman is set up in some kind of prophetic mode over a household, there will be great difficulty.

Bad dynamics in marriages can become very hard to shift, but there are some simple things we can do. For a start, we can go back to prayer and allow the burning lamp to illuminate matters. We've all had to look at our marriages and their fruit and ask, 'How on earth did we get *that* result?'

In this fourth interaction with Abraham, the Son of God manifested the glory of the face of the Eagle, which is the revelation of the

² See Ezekiel 1:4-14; Revelation 4:5-11

Fatherhood of God. He is not just God - He is our Father, and His word to Abraham was:

"Walk before Me and be blameless. I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly."

(Genesis 17:1-2)

God Almighty confirmed Abraham's personal discipleship and sanctification, then immediately proceeded to identify the covenant that He was making with Abraham and with his household, a covenant that had significant implications for his marriage and family life.

(In the same way, the promise of the New Covenant is for us *and* our households (Acts 16:31) and has significant implications for our marriages and family life. Although, as God's sons, we possess an inheritance in heavenly places in the new Heavens and new earth, we do not possess our households).

The first thing the Lord talked about with Abraham was his name, which until this time had been Abram.

"As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations." (Genesis 17:4-5)

Prior to this, Abram had identity, but God had to name him. Abraham's inheritance was by name; the land his descendants were to inherit was so much by name that it was their name. God would also rename Jacob, Abraham's grandson, Israel (Genesis 32:28); and later, Simon would be renamed Peter (John 1:42). These men all had identity, but only God's naming of them could establish them, their work and their inheritance as His sons.

In Jesus' parable, the prodigal son took his inheritance, ran off and spent it (Luke 15:11-32).

We see that happen in our world, when people take whatever gift they received in the body of Christ, whether in music, business or other fields, and go out using it for themselves, destroying their lives in the process. If they're fortunate, by the mercy of God, their efforts will come to nothing. Being very successful in misappropriating God's gifts is a mark of His judgement and is very sad.

The name 'Abraham' that Abram inherited from God made him father of a multitude instead of remaining only an exalted father. Abraham would be the father, model and prototype for every son of God who would ever be; who would walk in faith as he did.

A most remarkable consideration is that in changing Abram's name, Yahweh gave him part of His own name, Y'ah'weh, so that Abram became Abr'ah'am. The significance of God doing this is twofold. Firstly, it signifies that Yahweh gave Abraham an inheritance in His own name. Secondly, it shows us that Abraham received a portion of the capacity that belongs to the name of Yahweh. To be the father of many nations, Abraham was certainly going to need God's capacity!

In this same way, God ministers His capacity to us so that we can fulfil the mandate that belongs to the name He has given us. He gives us an inheritance in His name and capacity. But remember, whatever the Lord gives you is *Him*, it's not you. You will become and keep that name for all eternity, but what He gives each of us is by gift, and it's Him, not us. One of the great blasphemies would be to say that the gift of God is me. That drives people into great iniquity and destroys them.

When the Lord changed Abram's name, He also changed his wife Sarai's name to Sarah, giving her also a portion in His own name and capacity. Sarah and Abraham would each and

together as a couple fulfil the predestination that belonged to their new names.

Can you see why we take so much care around courtship? There's so much here that's so important to know, receive and understand, and you just don't know or receive it the moment you meet someone.

The Lord gave Abraham the mandate of recognising his wife's predestination in relation to their house. He was told to name her so that she would receive the capacity to fulfil her predestination. Wonderfully, the Lord declared to Abraham:

"...I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations;" (Genesis 17:16)

Coming to faith in relationship

But now Abraham cried out to God. He'd received the faith of a son of God in relation to his predestination; he'd received a new name, but he still had a veil of fear sitting over him because he couldn't have children.

"Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, "Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" And Abraham said to God, "Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!" (Genesis 17:18-19)

The major crisis for Abraham was his incapacity to believe in relation to his wife. Life always get down to pretty basic elements, doesn't it?

We start off marvellously with God proclaiming our names, and we accept them. But our names always find their outworking in relation to others. Whether you're married, single, a child, an adult, young or old, the measure of what you've understood is always found in its outworking in relation to other people. Abraham became susceptible again to a veil of unbelief and fear, starting right here in relation

to Sarah's incapacity to bear children Abraham's own weakness in relation to her.

When we see men susceptible to wrath and doubting (1 Timothy 2:8), often, behind that, there is fear. Where we see anger that keeps manifesting in not believing the word of God, and particularly in not believing His word in relation to a man's own name. But this is exactly where everything starts, for all of us. If we can't believe God in relation to our name, we're just going to 'cherry-pick' anything we like, and what we accept will depend on how we're feeling, who's impacting on us and whatever is going on in our life at the time. That's the same as living without God. We all know what that's like at times, but we don't have to live that way, because when we accept God's naming of us, then we have the context for every single word of God that comes. It all begins to make sense.

So, Abraham cried out. The veil of his fear caused him to laugh at the Lord's promise that he and Sarah would have a son in their old age. 'You've got to be joking! That's not going to happen.' His unbelief in relation to his wife's new name prompted him to plead with the Lord, 'Oh that Ishmael might live before you!' Back to the flesh for a solution he goes; back to what he could see, right in front of his face. But it's very carnal, isn't it, when we don't believe God and so propose an alternative solution that we can see? 'Here's the way, God. What's the problem with this? And it's already working!'

But Abraham's alternative did not come from an understanding of sonship and did not result in sonship. Neither do our alternatives. Only in Isaac would Abraham's children be named (Genesis 21:12), and we can see that fact in Isaac's son Jacob's assertion to his uncle Laban, who was taking advantage of him:

"Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had been with

me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed" (Genesis 31:42)

If not for the fear of Isaac and his willingness to offer, there would only have been emptiness. Clearly, offering was an integral part of Abraham's family culture and he had trained his son Isaac to make offering. Therefore, he could take Isaac up the mountain, offering up the very son he had asked God for and had received. Abraham could give him to God. This was the culture that he had learned from the Son of God, whose day he saw and rejoiced (John 8:56). So, figuratively, Abraham received Isaac back from the dead (Hebrews 11:19).

Before this, in his difficulty with his wife's incapacity, Abraham had cried out to God, wanting Ishmael, the son of his flesh, to live. He'd already prayed about Eliezer of Damascus, a man from his household, inheriting (Genesis 15:2). He had all sorts of worldly solutions to the problems he saw, as we so often do, and that's why he cried out for Ismael to be the one. But Abraham's 'solution' was *nothing* like what God wanted to do, just as the Hagar-Ishmael solution Abram and Sarai had previously engineered had not produced what God wanted (Genesis 16-17), and now Abraham was suggesting an upgrade of the previous work of their flesh to answer the current problem.

Not reverting to the flesh

It is always a desire but a bad idea to upgrade the flesh! It invariably makes things worse. Never the less, Abraham was praying this way. He was unhappy about his own and his wife's physical state and abilities. He was reticent to call his wife to the faith that God wanted to give them in their marriage and family as co-heirs of the grace of life.

Men, we all need to be delivered from that reticence! Women, you need to understand

how the flesh works and refuse to take advantage of that. If you install yourselves, or allow yourselves to be installed, over your households you will cause only grief. There is no grace at all when that happens. The answer to Abraham's and Sarah's predicament, and to ours, does not lie in the flesh but in the cutting away of the flesh by the covenant of circumcision; the circumcision of Christ, made without hands (Colossians 2:11), which cuts our own law, judgements and assessments out of our hearts.

What got Abraham into trouble here was his own assessment of good and evil, on which were based all his alternative solutions, all of which were bad. *Mine* are all bad. *Yours* are all bad. Can we accept that they are all, without any exception, bad? Accepting this will bring you to poverty of spirit, where you begin to cry out, knowing that there is no way and no life at all unless God circumcises your heart, and only He can do it. When you know this, you'll know that you can't keep running around as though you have all the initiative in the world, unsubmitted to the circumcision of Christ (Colossians 2:11).

Abraham had to come to this knowledge. When he was circumcised in the flesh, the capacity and the way that belonged to his new name as Abraham was activated and made available to him in his physical body.

As we join the fellowship of Christ's offering and submit to His circumcision in the circumstances of life, we also find His capacity to fulfil our name. Then, we are not victims of the things we suffer. We can accept God's just chastening of us - chastening that He has commuted from judgement. However, if we continue to define ourselves as victims of the things we suffer, and from that basis minister to others, affirming that they too are victims of their suffering, we are a million miles away

from the Gospel ourselves and leading others away after us.

The world wants to turn the church into a ministry for victims who have the right to feel resentful, angry and upset; who can break fellowship with anybody who is obedient and seeking to live a righteous life in Christ. The world will persecute these ones, as the Scriptures say. But we may *not* attempt to comfort people based on victimhood, wanting to comfort those who are suffering as if they are victims of their circumstances or of other people. This kind of ‘comfort’, which we have offered in the past, does not comfort. Rather, look to Jesus as our teacher. He was not a victim, yet He suffered for *all* our sin and dystrophy; for all the hatreds and petty grievances nursed in our hearts; for all the wrongs we do and the wrongs that will be done to us. He knew them all and died for them all, and He is asking each one of us, ‘Will you join me?’

Will you join Him?

There is no answer except to join Him. There is no chloroforming platitude to ‘make it better’. Sin hurts. Grief hurts. Nastiness wounds, and it hurts. Nobody is saying these things shouldn’t hurt, or that joining the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings means, ‘Stop complaining because by faith that shouldn’t hurt’.

Abraham was hurting. That’s why God said to him, ‘Do not fear.’ But He wasn’t casting Abram in the role of a victim. He was saying, ‘I’m coming to strengthen you, and you’re going to find faith to walk through this. If you draw back, My soul has no pleasure in you’ (Hebrews 10:38). God has no pleasure in us, and can’t help us, if we withdraw as victims. He is calling us to join Him, and that’s our only answer. It feels very hard at times, but there’s grace from Christ to do it.

As Abraham joined the covenant of Yahweh by circumcision, the capacity of Yahweh, the power and the love of God, came to him and was activated in his flesh and in his marriage. We recall the words of the Apostle John:

“God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.” (1 John 4:16)

We know that the name of Yahweh is endued with the love of Yahweh. On His way to the Garden of Gethsemane, in His prayer as High Priest, Jesus declared that He had made the Father’s name known to His disciples so that His love would be in them (John 17). We, too, can know and believe the love that God has for us (1 John 4:16).

Without any platitude, isn’t this the meaning of life? How much we need to join this process that’s being illuminated and delivered to us! How much we need the circumcision of Christ to deliver us from the propensity that fatally infected the heart of man at the fall and keeps dragging us back: assessing the whole of life as if we are the arbiters of good and evil. How much we need His deliverance, so that as children of His promise, established in our households, we come forth a multitude of His sons.

If we can receive His illumination, so much of the weight of the useless old gospels we’ve held but that just don’t work can be lifted away from us, and we can walk in His Gospel, sons of God giving glory to Him.