

Abraham, the Ideal Father.

Text: Gen 21:1-8

1) Exemplary in His Faith in God's Promises

Suggested Hymns:

2) Unswerving in Obedience to God's Will

257, 589, 456, 282, 465

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Genesis 21:1-8, ¹ *And the LORD visited Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken.* ² *For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.* ³ *And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him -- whom Sarah bore to him -- Isaac.*

⁴ *Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him.* ⁵ *Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.* ⁶ *And Sarah said, "God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me."* ⁷ *She also said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? For I have borne him a son in his old age."*

⁸ *So the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

What are the qualities that characterise a man as an ideal father? If we sketched a pattern of a father that could serve as an ideal, we would agree that we should include love for wife and children, concern for their welfare, safety, and security, and the example of a good life.

We would sketch into that pattern also a love for home, loyalty to family and friends, a sympathetic understanding of the problems of his children, wisdom to counsel them right, and perhaps a sense of humour. Fortunate, indeed, are the children who are blessed with a father that shows love, concern, loyalty,

sympathetic understanding and whose life radiates an ennobling example to all who observe him!

As Christians we also want to know what makes an ideal father according to God's standards. When a person becomes a Christian, he wants to please God in all things. The new man, created by faith in Jesus Christ, will think the thoughts of God and desire the things of God. He will do this out of gratitude for his salvation and in the strength which God supplies.

The branch grafted on the true Vine, Jesus Christ, will also bear the fruits of faith. By God's standards, the model father is concerned not only about the physical and temporal welfare of his family but also, and even more so, about the spiritual things and the needs of the soul. He lives in the right relationship to God and seeks to bring his family into the family of God.

Abraham is called "*the father of all those who believe*" in Rom. 4:11 and God's "*friend forever*" in 2 Chron. 20:7. He stands in Holy Scripture as a model father. We will learn much from a closer and more detailed study of Abraham, the Ideal Father. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Exemplary In His Faith In God's Promises

We look into the tent of a couple advanced in age. Abraham was 100 years old, and his wife, Sarah, was 90, when a child was born to them. They named the child Isaac, which means "*Laughing One.*" When the promise was made by God to Abraham that Sarah should bear him a son, he laughed questioningly.

Later when the Angel of the Lord brought the news again, Sarah heard it and laughed incredulously. After the child was born, Sarah laughed for joy that her reproach in being childless was taken away. As we glimpse at the happy family, there is more than meets the eye. In the heart of father Abraham was a deep faith in the promises of God, who had chosen him from among all the children of men to be the father of God's chosen people and the ancestor from whom the Saviour of the world, Jesus Christ, the Seed in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed, would descend. His exemplary faith in the promises of God qualifies him for the title, "the ideal father."

God's Word is Abraham's greatest certainty. St. Paul describes the faith of Abraham in the words, "*Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.*"¹ This faith was tested severely. Abraham was almost 75

years old when the call of the Lord came to him, ***“Get out of your country, From your family And from your father’s house, To a land that I will show you. ² I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”***²

The word of God was to Abraham the greatest certainty. With no other motive to prompt him except that the Lord had spoken, Abraham departed for the country to which God would direct him. It was not even revealed to him where this land lay to which he would be directed. He ventured and forsook all because he believed God.

As we study the portrait of his character in Holy Scripture, we can certainly emphasise that the most glorious part of this call and promise was the last, ***“in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed,”*** or, as God put it in a later assurance, ***“In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.”***³

God had not forgotten His pledge, given on that ill-fated day when man had succumbed to Satan’s seduction, defied God’s will, and earned the curse of death through sin. That promise of the Woman’s Seed, who was to crush the head of Satan and free man from sin, is now renewed by God, after an interval of two thousand years, with unmistakable clarity and definitely settled on Abraham’s descendants.

Another lantern of prophecy shone in the darkness. How the soul of pious Abraham must have been stirred to its very depth when he received the promise that the Saviour would descend from him!

Abraham has a resolute trust in God’s promises and directions. Abraham is, without question, an outstanding example of faith in God’s Word. He travels towards an unknown destination with nothing to go by but the promise of God. He is 75 years old, and his wife is 65. He has the promise that he is to become a great nation which would populate a great land and from which would come the Saviour, the Seed in whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

But Abraham does not have a child, and his wife is barren. For long, long years there is no indication whatsoever that the promise would be fulfilled. He travels about from place to place and finally settles in Hebron. But the Lord gives him no inheritance in it, not so much as a little plot of ground. Sarah, his

wife, was growing older and continued to remain childless. All Abraham has is the promise, repeated and amplified from time to time, but it remained only a promise for 25 trying years.

Surely, it required a strong faith not to waver. But Abraham did not waver. The promise sustained and comforted him, and by the power of God he was kept in the faith. Of this, the divine Commentator, speaks in the Book of Hebrews, ⁸ *By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.* ⁹ *By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise;* ¹⁰ *for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*⁴

Wherever he dwelt on his lengthy journey, he built altars that he might worship God, in whose unfailing promises he maintained a resolute trust. The Lord was so pleased with Abraham's attitude of child-like faith that He continued to talk with him as friend with friend, reminding him of His purpose and expanding on His covenant.

Now, after 25 years, Abraham experienced the fruits of his faith as we glimpse into the tent of the aged couple. Abraham and Sarah experienced the thrill of their lives. The promised son, Isaac, is born. Our text says, ² *For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.* So simply it is stated in the holy record. Should it be surprising?

It is self-evident with God that whatever He promises has to come true. It is a matter of course. Also the great joy of the parents is given a restrained description. It is seen in the name selected for the child, Isaac, in the explanation which Sarah gives for the name, and in the great feast which Abraham made on the day the child was weaned.

Obviously, here is a father who saw in his child the fulfilment of a great longing, who loved this child dearly, and whose hopes and plans centred in this child. God had rewarded him for his faith in the promise.

The path which faith walks is illustrated by Abraham's actions. The Christian father should learn much from Abraham's exemplary faith. We have

far clearer directions than had father Abraham, for whom the path was revealed step by step as he followed God's call. We have the complete Bible to guide us.

Our call is to the far country of heaven, which we shall attain by faith in Jesus Christ, the Seed of Abraham. His death on the cross for man's sin assures us of forgiveness with God, of the answer to prayer, and of heaven. We have here no abiding city. Shall we be concerned merely about our earthly welfare and the material welfare of our children? That would be folly.

Our children have immortal souls which need to be saved, and only Jesus can fulfil that need. Like Abraham, who built altars wherever he journeyed that he might worship God, and whose great longing was the fulfilment of God's promise, which he never doubted, so should we be guided by the Spirit of God to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Only when we live in the light of God's promises and walk in the paths of His righteousness will we be enabled to give our children that which blesses and ennobles for time and for eternity. Such steadfast, firm faith makes Abraham the ideal father.

2. Unswerving In Obedience To God's Will

Another trait of Abraham qualifies him for the title "*the ideal father.*" It is his unswerving obedience to God's will.

Obedience follows true faith. The branch that is grafted on the vine receives strength and nourishment from the vine and bears fruit. The child of God, united with God through the Saviour, will bring forth the fruits of faith in holy obedience. Abraham's faith consistently yielded a rich harvest. Though the way was often dark, his duty was always plain, and he turned not to the right or to the left. In his answer to God's call and during the long journey in a strange land, he consistently left us the example of unswerving obedience to God's will.

Abraham was obedient to the Covenant. God had made the covenant, or agreement, with Abraham that he would become a large nation, that this nation would possess a large land, and that the Saviour would descend from his loins.

This covenant was to be sealed with the rite of circumcision. All the male children were to be circumcised on the eighth day after birth as a token of

membership among God's people. Refusal to comply with this divine ordinance excluded the person from God's people.⁵

Our text says, *'Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him.* He is careful to obey the will of God also in this particular matter.

With the coming of the promised Seed, Jesus Christ, God fulfilled the covenant which He had made. The token, or visible sign, of that agreement to send the Saviour was circumcision. With the fulfilment of the promise, this token is no longer required of us.

Paul emphasises this fact in his Letter to the Colossians. We read in Colossians 2:11-12, *'In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹² buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.*

Thus the Sacrament of Baptism becomes a parallel to the rite of circumcision. It is the mark of one who belongs to the family of God through faith in Jesus Christ. How sincerely we should, therefore, bring our children to the Lord in Holy Baptism that they may become partakers of the redemption which is in Christ and heirs of the promise.

Abraham showed unwavering obedience despite the severest test. Joy reigned supreme in the grove-sheltered home of Abraham in Beersheba as he saw the first proof of the realisation of God's promise in the birth of Isaac, as he circumcised the child on the eighth day, and as he made a feast when the child was weaned.

But Abraham, *"the father of all those who believe,"* must be tried by the severest test of all, which has no parallel in the history of mortal men. When the infant had grown to be a sturdy lad, God said to Abraham: *"Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."*⁶

Each word of that command is like a knife forced deeper and deeper into the father's heart. Abraham was human, and he felt the keen edge of every word. He loved the lad deeply, and Isaac represented the fulfilment of God's promise. But there is no indication of a struggle against the command or of internal conflict between self and God. His faith stands firm as does the oak which no storm can uproot. His obedience does not waver, though his heart must have bled.

With apparent composure he rises early the next morning, saddles his donkey, and takes the lad and the necessary equipment for the sacrifice. For three days they travel to Mount Moriah to perform the sacrifice. God carried the test to the limit. The altar is built, the wood is arranged on the altar, and Isaac is bound as the sacrifice. Abraham stretched forth his hand to plunge the knife into his son's heart. But God suddenly called him and commanded him to stop. Abraham's faith had withstood the supreme test, and his obedience had not faltered.

Again God affirmed His covenant and promise. And Abraham saw a ram caught by its horns in the bushes. He offered it instead of his son. On the obedience of Abraham the writer of Hebrews comments that Abraham believed *"that God was able to raise him [Isaac] up, even from the dead."*⁷

It is also important to note that the promises to which Abraham was obedient were all fulfilled. Abraham was willing to offer up his son, his only son, his beloved son. God actually did sacrifice His Son, His only Son, His beloved Son, on the accursed tree of the cross so that sinners might have life through faith.

Abraham was moved by the love of God to prove his faith in God. God, however, so loved the sinful world *"that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."*⁸ Thus the promised Messiah, of the Seed of Abraham according to His human nature, and the Son of God according to His divine nature, redeemed the world. And all the nations of the earth, also we today, are blessed in Him.

How gloriously are the promises of God fulfilled! Abraham, the friend of God, whose faith was counted to him for righteousness, had the promise that he would become a great nation, countless as the stars of heaven and the sand of the sea. Twelve nations sprang from Ishmael, the son whom he had with Sarah's hand-maiden Hagar.

But countless were the descendants of Isaac who were called the Children of Israel. After the death of Sarah, Abraham remarried and was given six sons by that marriage,⁹ who became the fathers of many tribes. He was truly Abraham, the “*father of nations.*” These are the children of Abraham according to the flesh.

Christ, the Seed of Abraham, in whom all the nations of the earth are blessed, came to establish His spiritual kingdom by means of His cross, death, and resurrection. The millions of people who believe in Him as the Christ and Saviour are referred to in the New Testament writings as the spiritual children of Abraham.¹⁰

The millions who believe in Christ down through the ages, and who compose that victorious assembly before God’s throne, dressed in the white garments, and washed in the blood of Jesus, waving palm branches, and singing the song of redemption through Christ, are the nations which are blessed by the Seed of Abraham; yes, they are the true children of Abraham. They have persevered in faith in the promises of God and rendered Him sincere obedience.

Faith in the promises of God and unswerving obedience to the will of God make Abraham the ideal father. May we always be numbered among his spiritual children through faith in Christ, may our homes always be the dwelling place of God, and may we follow in the footsteps of his faith and obedience until we reach the Promised Land above and receive the inheritance of the faithful. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Romans 4:3

² Genesis 12:1-3

³ Genesis 22:18

⁴ Hebrews 11:8-10

⁵ Gen. 17:9-14

⁶ Genesis 22:2

⁷ Hebrews 11:19

⁸ John 3:16

⁹ Gen 25:1

¹⁰ Cf. Rom. 4:1-3,11-22; Gal. 3:7-9