

THE CALL OF ABRAHAM

NO. 261

A SERMON
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“By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.”
Hebrews 11:8

ABRAHAM’S faith was of the most eminent order, for he is called the Father of the Faithful. Let us rest assured that nothing but repeated and fiery trials could have trained his faith to so great a strength as that which it exhibited in his preparation to slay his son at the command of God. This true Jerusalem blade was long tempered before it gained its marvelous edge and matchless temper.

Men come not to their perfect stature except by years of growth. Stars cannot reach the zenith of the heavens by one sudden flash, nay even the sun himself must climb to his meridian. Trials are the winds which root the tree of our faith. They are the trainers, drilling God’s young soldiers, and teaching their hands to war and their fingers to fight. Foremost among Abraham’s trials was that of being called away to a land which he had never seen. As this may be our trial also, I pray that my words may be adapted to our present condition.

I. First, let us LOOK AT ABRAHAM.

Abraham’s family was originally an idolatrous one, afterwards some beams of light shone in upon the household, and they became worshippers of the true God, but there was much ignorance mingled with their worship, and at least occasionally their old idolatrous habits returned. The Lord who had always fixed on Abraham to be His chosen servant and the father of His chosen people upon earth, made Abraham leave the society of his friends and relatives, and go out of Ur of the Chaldees, and journey away to the land of Canaan, which He had promised afterwards to give him for an inheritance.

We shall notice first *what Abraham left*, and then, where *Abraham went*, the trial is made up of these two things. What had he to leave? He had to leave behind him those who were exceeding dear to him. It is true that just after his first call, his own father, Terah, died, having gone a part of the way with Abraham and detained Abraham a little while by sickness. Abraham then went on his way, obedient to the Lord’s command.

Nevertheless, he left behind him all the association of his youth, the house in which he had been trained, the family with which he had been nursed, all those whom he had known and with whom he had taken sweet counsel, and he must go forth into exile from the family of his love. He left behind him his native country, and to a patriot that is no small struggle—to leave all the associations of one’s country, and bear with us one’s native songs to be sung in distant valleys. Many a man has felt keenly enough the separation from home and kindred, and next to that, the sad banishment from his native land.

Besides, we all know with what inconvenience Abraham must have removed. He had a considerable property in flocks and herds, and probably had the ancestral dwelling house in which to reside. He must leave all these, and he must also leave the fair pastures wherein his flocks and his father’s flocks had been fed, and he must wend his way into the wilderness. He must give up all agricultural pursuits, renounce his vine and his fig tree, and go his way, he knew not whither, to a land which to him was as unknown as the valley of the shadow of death.

Those of you who have had to part from those you loved, who have had your hearts rent when loved ones have been torn away, can sympathize somewhat with Abraham’s trial when he left home and family, and country, and all, to go forth into an unknown land. This is the place from which he went.

Now, let us turn to *the place to which he journeyed*. When men emigrate, they wish to know the nature of the country in which they are to live. If it be a richer country than their own, although it be with some reluctance, they spread the sail and speed across the waters, and it may be, after they have settled there a little while, their mother country is almost forgotten, and they find a settled dwelling place in their adopted land.

But Abraham knew nothing of the country to which he was about to move, he had simply God's promise that it should be his inheritance. It was, it might be said, a wild goose chase, and the profane would deride it as a mad and idle dream. Doubtless, the prudent father cautioned him to avoid so great a risk, and the anxious mother bade him remember that, as a bird wanders from his nest, so is he who leaves his place.

But amidst all this, Abraham was wiser than the wisest, for he put aside all worldly maxims, he set the precept above the maxim, and considered the promise more precious than the proverb. Well was it for Abraham that he knew that the wise things of men are often ignorance dressed out in its best clothes.

It has been said by an acute old writer, that when Christ came into Jerusalem—and He was incarnate wisdom—He came riding upon an ass, but when Satan came into paradise—and he is infernal folly—he came in the shape of a wise creature, the subtle serpent. Wisdom came riding upon stupidity, and folly came in the garments of craftiness. We shall often find it so in our lives. Simplicities are next akin to revelations. Plain simple things, and especially a plain simple obedience, are next akin to the very wisdom of the seer, and he who knows how to read the precept need not be afraid that the prophecy will ever contradict it, or render obedience to the precept an act of folly.

Abraham then went forth, he knew not whither. "The journey is a long one," say some timid ones. "It is so," said Abraham, "but God will help me on the way." "The end of your journey may be doleful," they say. "No," saith Abraham, "it cannot be doleful, it may be disappointing to my worldly ambition, but not to my faith. I believe that God will be with me, and that take me where He may, I shall lack no good thing." So Abraham went on his way along a lone and weary journey, and God did not desert him, but graciously provided for him.

I have spoken to you of what Abraham left, and whither he went, now I would have you observe for a moment *how it was that Abraham went*. It is said that when he was commanded, he obeyed. Ere the precept had gone forth, obedience had come forth to meet it with rejoicing. God had scarcely spoken ere Abraham replied. Just as the thunder follows the lightning's flash, instanter, when the storm is near, so when faith is near, the thunder of our obedience follows the mighty flash of God's influence in our hearts. If God bids us do, we should do at once.

Abraham went without any hesitation. He did not say, "Lord give me a little time, I will go in a week. Suffer me first to go and bury my father." I do not find that he said, "Lord let me tarry till harvest be reaped." No, he was commanded to go, and he went without hesitation. There were no carnal arguments between God and Abraham, for God has not invited *His people* to reason with Him with human arguments.

He has invited *sinner*s to do it—"Come now and let us reason together," He has said. When men have no faith, God invites them to reason, but when they have faith, reasoning with God becomes a sin. Abraham asked no question, he was not like Moses, he did not say, "Who am I that thou shouldest send me," but when he was commanded to go, he went and he followed God without hesitation.

And then again, we have every reason to believe that he obeyed *without reluctance*. He went as cheerfully away from his father's house as he had ever gone into it. I know not that he was sent away with the voice of tabret and of harp, but I am sure there was the voice of music in his heart. He might have said, "I go as cheerfully today I know not where, as ever I have gone to the fat land of Egypt or the spice-bearing country of the Sabeans."

Men said his journey was absurd and deplorable, but to him it was the happiest and the best, for God was with him, and if the star did not guide him as it did the wise men to Bethlehem, yet there was a star within his own soul that shone like a sun, and lighted his footsteps, and cheered his spirit, and sent him

on his joyous way towards his appointed habitation. He went cheerfully, not knowing whither he went, not starting and fretting like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, but running with willing footsteps in the way of God. The ancients pictured Mercury with wings upon its heels, and surely faith has them there.

*“Tis love that makes our willing feet
In swift obedience move.”*

Love may be the wings, but the wings are upon the feet of faith, and it flies to do the will of God whilst hearkening to His commands.

But then, notice that when Abraham started, he *made no stipulations with his Lord*. If God had commanded Abraham to go to the utmost bounds of the green earth, to “rivers unknown to song,” Abraham would have departed. If God had commanded him to ford the Atlantic, Abraham would have obeyed. His feet would have been willing to attempt a miracle, and the stormy billows would have been dry before his march.

We may rest assured that when Abraham started, he asked no questions concerning how far or to what place he was journeying. He left that all in the hands of God. His faith put its hand inside the hand of its Father, and he was content to be led wherever his Father would lead him.

Now, it is always foolish in us to be led by man, for then “the blind lead the blind, and both fall into the ditch,” but for the blind to be led by God is one of the best and wisest things. We sometimes put blinkers upon horses that they may not see too much, I fear we might wear such things ourselves to great advantage.

In watching with the eyes of carnal reason for objections to God’s precept and providence, it would be well if our eyes were burnt out, for better for us to enter into life having no eyes than having two eyes to follow our own devices and find our end destruction in hell fire. Abraham’s faith, then, was a tried one. And now I conclude this sketch of the patriarch’s call, by observing that Abraham’s faith was well-rewarded.

I think with all the trials of Abraham, you and I might even envy his position. That tent of his was a royal tent. Never did the curtains of Solomon himself enshroud more true royalty, or kingly nobility, than this poor tent in which Abraham sojourned. What a blessed man was he. His very dreams were blessed. The Lord was his shield and his exceeding great reward.

A land was given to him, and was it a barren land? No. The Jews of old used to say that Canaan was the breast of the world, for there was always an abundance of milk and fatness. Other countries might have been the world’s extremities, but this was the world’s own breast, flowing with milk and honey. God gave him from the river of Egypt, even to the great river—the river Euphrates, and he looking from his starry heights as an exalted patriarch, saw a race as numerous as the sand of the sea inhabiting the land. And he expects a mightier blessing yet. He looks for the day when the sons of Abraham shall at the second coming of Christ be assembled in their own land, and all the people shall walk in the light of Zion.

I think I have said enough about Abraham. Had my voice been strong enough, I could have enlarged, for it is a subject upon which much might be said extremely interesting to the spiritual mind.

II. But now I come to observe that YOU AND I MAY BE PLACED IN THE SAME POSITION.

At their first conversion, very many of the people of God are called to pass through the precise trial which Abraham endured. Some of us, it is true, were born of pious parents, and our conversion was a theme of joy to the house, it made jubilee, the fatted calf was killed, and there was music and dancing.

But others were born as children of the Philistines, our parents were haters of God. I may be addressing such. No sooner did you begin to attend the house of God, than your father was the first to laugh at you, and when you were detected on your knees, mother, and brothers, and sisters, all assailed you with sneers and ridicule. It may be that you have suffered much household persecution for the sake of Christ’s cross, and the profession of it you have made.

Moreover, you may have been called to separate yourself from your whole ancestry, for in looking back you cannot detect on the family tree one branch that ever bore heavenly fruit. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint. The whole family has been given up to Satan, and only you have been called to bear a lonely protest to the Gospel of Christ, you have come out, you have blighted your own worldly prospects, you have drowned your own interest in crossing the river.

You have suffered the loss of all things for Christ's sake, and perhaps at the time you may have been greatly staggered, nay, even now you may be passing through the fiery trial. You may be staggering in your soul and saying, "Can this be right? Shall I give up my religion, shall I put back into port, or shall I encounter these waves that threaten to submerge my vessel?"

Dear brothers and sisters, if father and mother forsake you, then the Lord will take you up. "He who loves father and mother, and house and lands, more than me," saith Christ, "is not worthy of me." You must leave all for Christ's sake. Be prepared. If they will come with you, take their compliance gladly, if they will not, then come alone, "Come ye out from among them; be ye separate, touch not the unclean thing." Be an Abraham. Leave everything, and if you do this in faith, verily ye shall not lack your reward. He is able, and He has promised to give you in this life ten times more than you lose for Him, and in the world to come life everlasting.

Such Christians as I have referred to, who are not called in early life to endure this trial, frequently have to bear its counterpart at another stage in their journey. On a sudden their minds are enlightened with regard to the pure simplicity of the Gospel, their family is professedly religious and they have been in the habit of attending a certain place of worship with their kindred and friends, till at length a change passes over their religious views.

Perhaps it is a doctrinal change, they have imbibed the orthodox faith from the pure fountain of revelation itself, unalloyed by the traditions and qualifications of men, they have cast away all the heterodox glossary of man, and have determined to believe nothing but the sovereign grace of God. Perhaps their views on baptism may have changed, and seeing nothing in Scripture to warrant infant sprinkling, they have come out with a determination to practice believer's baptism. It may be that this entails the scoff and scorn of all who know them.

This grieves the hearts of those who know and love Jesus, and the questions arise with them, "What shall I do?" These matters may be nonessential, shall I keep them back? Shall I for charity's sake weaken my testimony? Shall I only bear testimony to points on which I may agree with other people, and hold my tongue about the rest?

Oh, my dear friends, such carnal policy, if you practice it, will do you serious injury. Whatever you believe, carry it out. Depend upon it a grain of truth is a grain of diamond dust, and it is precious. There may be truths nonessential to our *salvation*, but there are no nonessential truths with regard to our comfort. Every truth is essential. We must keep back none, but follow the Lord wholly, let this be your song,

*"Through floods and flames, if Jesus lead,
I'll follow where He goes,
'Hinder me not,' shall be my cry,
Though earth and hell oppose."*

The tendency of the present age is to compromise, we are asked continually to qualify our testimony, to cut off some portion of the truth we preach, to smooth down and polish our words. God forbid, we will not do so. Whatever we believe to be true, to the last jot and tittle, we will speak it out. I hope as long as I live there will always be a straight road from my heart to my mouth, and that I shall be able to preach whatever I believe in my soul, and to keep nothing reserved. Do you the same. Though you should forsake all, and should be by all forsaken, for the truth's sake, with Abraham's trial and Abraham's faith, you shall have Abraham's honor and Abraham's reward.

How often has this temptation happened to the rich. When those who have moved in court circles have suddenly become the subjects of the enlightening Spirit of divine grace, what opposition they have had to encounter! Many have been the noble ladies and gentlemen who have sat in this hall, yet although I know many of them were impressed, how few of them have remained! Here and there one, they shine like the gleanings of the vintage—here and there, one upon the topmost boughs.

And what is the reason? Is it that their consciences are incapable of conviction? Is it simply that the cares of this life, or the deceitfulness of riches chokes the Word, and by and by they are offended? It is not likely that the simple worship of our unendowed meeting houses is to win the palm of courtly applause, it is not likely that the name of Dissenter is to be held respectable, it is not likely that Calvinism is to become the court religion of England, it is not likely, at least at present, that a poor, simple, honest man's ministry will be a ministry that courtiers regard, we never expected it.

Nevertheless, there have been some, and God bless them, who have not been ashamed to come out and leave behind them their former associates and take part with the despised people of God, scarcely knowing whither they went. Though they did know we were poor, and most of us uneducated and illiterate, they have taken their portion with us, and they have shown no signs of turning back, but do even glory in that which some count to their shame. God bless them, and that abundantly.

Again this trial of faith comes oftentimes in matters of providence. We have been lining our nests very softly, and counting all the eggs that are laid therein, with the greatest cheerfulness and delight, we have had much goods laid up for many years, and all of a sudden, Misfortune, like a wicked boy, has climbed the tree and pulled down the nests, and the birds had to fly, and we have said, "Whither shall we go?" But God has comforted us, and we have said in our hearts, "Every tree in the forest of earth is doomed to the axe, why therefore, should we build our nest here? Let us fly away and find our home in the rock of ages." And God has rewarded our faith.

Our business, though suddenly blighted when flourishing in one place, has been, when removed amidst sad misgivings and dark uncertainties, even more flourishing in another, or if not, if trials have multiplied and poverty has succeeded wealth, yet grace has increased, and as our afflictions abounded, our consolations have much more abounded.

I believe, dear friends, that many and many a time you, in your providential journey will have to go forth, not knowing whither you are going. But it is good for you, do not murmur at it. If the father of the faithful had to do it, why should the sons murmur? The father of the family must not know whither he was going, and shall you, the sons and daughters, long to read the future with wistful curious eyes? No, wherever God in His providence guides you, let it be your joy to know that He is too wise to err—too good to be unkind.

And beloved, this is what I feel at the present moment respecting the position of ourselves as a congregation. I was put to this test by considering the way in which God led us, especially in reference to this place. It is now nearly three years since Exeter Hall was shut against us, for reasons which I have never considered to be fully justifiable. Then it was we went forth not knowing whither we went, and this place was prepared for us.

It is more than probable that after two more Sabbaths have elapsed we must go forth again not knowing whither we shall go. But my faith is fixed upon Him who has provided for us hitherto. This congregation cannot be scattered. God has gathered it, and we will go forth assured that a place shall be discovered in which we shall meet, and this shall work for the furtherance of the Gospel, and for the glory of God.

I feel that perhaps God has another host of sinners to be aroused and converted to Christ. We are getting old steady sort of folks here, and we have settled into a respectable concern. We may be turned into the streets, but God going with us, we care not where we go. Wherever it is, we shall be kept together, we are not men whose attachment has been formed hastily. We love each other.

Like Abraham, and Lot and his family, we will journey together, we have no cause to fear. Do not, I entreat you, betray the slightest distress about it, if God has done it, He has wise purposes, let us submit

in silence, and believe it must and shall be well. Abraham went forth “not knowing whither he went.” We will imitate him. While Abraham’s faith is our faith, Abraham’s God is our God. He speaks and every doubt is hushed, “Fear not Abraham, I am thy shield and thine exceeding great reward.” So then we may boldly say, “The LORD is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.”

And I thought, while meditating upon this text, that the time must come to each of us, when in a certain sense, we must go forth from this world, not knowing the place to which we are going. The hour is coming when you and I shall lie low upon our silent beds of languishing, and the message will come—“Arise and go forth from the house in which you have dwelt, from the city in which you have done business, from your wife, from your children, from your bed, and from your table. Arise and take your last journey.”

And what know I of the journey? A little have I read of it, and somewhat has been revealed by the Spirit to my soul, but how little do we know of the realms of the future! We know there is a black and stormy river called “Death.” He bids me cross it. May He give me grace to go through the stream! And after death, what comes? No traveler has returned to tell. Some say it is a land of confusion and of the shadow of death. Well, be it what it may, we will go forth, not knowing whither we go, but yet knowing that since He is with us, passing through the gloomy vale, we need fear no evil.

We must be going to our Father’s house, be that where it may. We must be going to our heavenly Father’s kindly home, where Jesus is, to that royal city which has foundations whose builder and maker is God. This shall be our last removal, to dwell forever with Him we love, to dwell in the bosom of God. We will take our last journey and we will not fear to take it, for God is our refuge and strength, our helper in the hour of trouble and of death.

III. And now, my voice almost fails me, and therefore, I must come at once to the last point, which is that of EXHORTING YOU MOST CHEERFULLY TO FOLLOW THE GUIDE OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE AND PRECEPT, LEAD IT WHEREVER IT MAY.

Let us follow the Shepherd with a ready mind, because He has a perfect right to lead us wherever He pleases. We are not our own, we are bought with a price. If we were our own, you might repine at our circumstances, but since we are not, let this be our cry, “Do what thou wilt, O LORD, and though thou slay me, yet will I trust in thee,” we are not true to our profession of being Christians if we pick and choose for ourselves. Picking and choosing are great enemies to submission. In fact, they are not at all consistent therewith. If we are really Christ’s Christians, let us say, “It is the LORD, let him do what seemeth him good.”

And then in the next place, we ought to submit because wherever He may lead us, if we know not where we go, we do know one thing, we know *with whom* we go, we do not know the road, but we do know the *guide*. We may feel that the journey is long, but we are quite sure that the everlasting arms that carry us are strong enough, be the journey ever so many leagues in length. We do not know what may be the inhabitants of the land into which we may come, Canaanites or not, but we do know that the Lord our God is with us, and He shall surely deliver them into our hands.

Another reason why we should follow with simplicity and faith all the commands of God is this, because we may be quite sure they shall all end well. They may not be well apparently while they are going on, but they will end well at last. You sometimes see in a factory the wheels running some this way, and some the other, and some crossways, and they seem to be playing all sorts of antics, but somehow or other the deviser brings them all to work for some settled object.

And I know that come prosperity or come adversity, come sickness or come wealth, come foe, come friend, come popularity, or come contempt, His purpose shall be worked out, and that purpose shall be pure, unmingled good to every blood-bought heir of mercy on whom His heart is set.

And I may add, to conclude. Let us as a congregation, above all others, put the most implicit trust in our wonder working God, when we recollect what He has already done for us, how He has made the wrath of man to praise Him, the contempt, the contumely, and the scorn has helped to bring to this place the willing thousands to hear the Word. The abuse of our enemies has been our best help, our grandest

assistance, and in looking back day after day, and Sabbath after Sabbath, I can only hold up my hands and exclaim, "What hath God wrought!"

And shall *we* doubt for the future? No, mariner, hoist the sail, loose the rudder bands, drag up the anchor, once again to sea we go, with the flag of faith at the masthead, with JEHOVAH at the helm, to a sure port the vessel shall be guided, though the storm may howl, and hell beneath shall be stirred, for God is with us, and the God of Abraham is our refuge. God give to every one of you the firmest trust in His providence that you may go forth not knowing whither you go.

As for you that believe not in God, may you be led to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Redeemer, and afterwards to trust your God, and leave all your concerns in His hands.

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