

Where is God in all this?

14 June - Abraham

Into the unknown: The place of faith when times are uncertain

Notes and discussion questions for home groups or personal study – Brian Bull

Readings

Genesis 12:1-9

Hebrews 11:8-10

Matthew 6:25-34

Key verses

“So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran.”

“By faith Abraham ... obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.”

“Do not worry... Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you.”

Background

Read **Genesis 12:1-9**

Abraham had the whole land of Canaan in which to wander and to find pastureland for his flocks and his cattle. But he was called out of Ur of the Chaldees, which was probably the most civilized city of the time, with all its comforts and “mod cons”, to follow God’s plan for his life “not knowing where he was going”.

There were other local tribes living in Canaan, but no others who shared Abraham’s faith in God and his religious or moral standards. When Abraham wanted to find a wife for his son Isaac he sent his servant all the way back to Haran, to his brother’s family, to find a suitable marriage partner. He and his family were lone God-followers in a sea of immorality and idolatry.

The main problem that Abraham faced throughout his life – and it’s a problem that we all face in our current lockdown situation – was not knowing when or how his nomadic wanderings would end... when God’s promises and plans would be fulfilled.

God had promised Abraham that ...

1. He would have a son and through him become the father of a great nation, that his descendants would be as many as the stars in the sky, as the grains of sand in the desert.
2. That God would give his descendants the land of Canaan as their inheritance.

But the details were sketchy, or even non-existent. Abraham had no idea how long he would have to wait before his promised son would be born, or how it would happen seeing that Sarah was barren. And as for inheriting the land of Canaan, that could not become a reality for many generations.

- How does Abraham’s situation compare with our own lockdown experience?
 - If you had the ability to see into the future and find out how things would turn out after lockdown, what questions would you want answered?
 - How does the not knowing affect your own state of mind?... your ability to plan and prepare for the future?... your relationship with God?
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The Promise of a Son

Abraham’s not knowing how God’s promises would be fulfilled led him to try and find alternative solutions to help God along the way.

In Genesis 15:1-6 Abraham proposes appointing his faithful servant Eliezer as his rightful heir.

- How does God answer him?
- How does Abraham respond to God’s revelation?... how does God reward Abraham’s response?

In Genesis 16:1-5 Sarah proposes that Abraham takes her handmaid Hagar as a second wife in order to have a child.

- What is the result of following Sarah’s suggestion?
- How does this complicate matters for Abraham and Sarah?

God is gracious to Hagar and to her son Ishmael, and promises to bless Ishmael and make him also the father of a great nation, but this does not fulfil God's promise to Abraham.

In Genesis 17:15-21 Abraham suggests that Ishmael will be his heir.

- How does God respond to this suggestion?
- What promise does God make to Abraham?

God could have told Abraham many years before how long he would have to wait for Sarah to have a son.

- Why do you think he might have kept Abraham waiting and not knowing?
 - What lessons do you think God was teaching Abraham throughout this time?
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The Promise of a Country

Read Genesis 13:7-18

After Abraham and Lot separated because of quarrels over shortage of water and pasture for their flocks, Lot (unwisely as later events proved) chose to go and pitch his tents in the Jordan Valley close to Sodom, but Abraham continued his life as a wandering nomad.

- How did God reward Abraham for his faith? (verses 14-17)

Read Hebrews 11:8-10

- What was it that sustained Abraham through all his nomadic wanderings?
 - What was he looking forward to?
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Seek first the Kingdom of God

Read Matthew 6:25-34

The passage in Hebrews 11 suggests that the final goal of Abraham's faith was not in this world but in the next. Abraham, like all those other heroes of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11, was looking forward to a heavenly eternal Kingdom that would last for eternity.

Jesus' words in Matthew 6 tells us that God's eternal Kingdom can be part of our lives now, and if we put God's Kingdom first it will transform our attitude towards every other aspect of our lives.

- How can Jesus' words here change the way we view our own situation in lockdown?
 - What does "*seek first his kingdom and his righteousness*" mean in practice for the way we live our own lives, and relate to our families and communities?
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Witnessing within our locked down community

We of course have questions, concerns, worries about all kinds of things as the implications of Covid-19 affect our prospects for the future, and the implications for our children. But we do have God's promises to rely on, and the presence of God's Spirit in our lives to provide comfort and strength in our need.

How can we be a witness and an encouragement to people around us who don't have the same faith experience to support them? How can we, in this time of lockdown, reach out with God's love and grace?

Final thought

Matthew 6:34 tells us "*do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*"

Maybe the best lesson we can take from looking at the life of Abraham is to take each day at a time. Enjoy God's blessings. Love one another. Leave the future in God's hands. God is faithful.

Pray that God will give us the faith to place the future in his hands, and will comfort and encourage us when we become worried and concerned about what the future might hold.

Pray for all those who are worried about their jobs, about caring for their families and feeding their children.

Pray for children returning to school, and college students who are worried about their studies and what the implications will be for future career prospects.