

Hearken and Look; or, Encouragement for Believers

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon encourages believers to find hope and strength by looking to the faith and calling of Abraham, reminding them that God can raise up faithful servants even in the darkest times.

Scripture: Isaiah 51:2-3, Joshua 24:2, Romans 4:20, 1 Corinthians 3:6, Genesis 12:1-3, Acts 9:1-6, Psalm 23:4, Hebrews 11:8

Topics: "Faith", "Encouragement", "God's Providence"

Description

In this devotional sermon, C.H. Spurgeon exhorts believers to find encouragement by looking to Abraham, the father of faith, as an example of God's power to call and bless even one individual to accomplish His purposes. Spurgeon addresses the dangers of discouragement and calls Christians to renew their strength by trusting in God's promises and providence. Through vivid biblical illustrations, he assures believers that God can raise up faithful servants in every generation, even in the darkest times.

Transcript

(The Annual Sermon on behalf of the Baptist Missionary Society)

'Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him For the Lord shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.'"Isaiah 51:2-3.

THE second verse contains my actual text. It is the argument by which faith is led to look for the blessings promised in the third verse.

It is habitual with some persons to spy out the dark side of every question or fact: they fix their eyes upon the 'waste places,' and they study them till they know every ruin, and are familiar with the dragons and the owls. They sigh most dolorously that the former times were better than these, and that we have fallen upon most degenerate days. They speak of 'shooting Niagara,' and of all sorts of frightful things. I am afraid that a measure of this tendency to write bitter things dwells in almost all of us at this present season, for certain discouraging facts which cannot be ignored are pressing heavily upon men's spirits. The habit of looking continually towards the wildernesses is injurious because it greatly discourages; and anything

that discourages an earnest worker is a serious leakage for his strength. Perhaps a worse result than honest discouragement comes of depressing views, for they often afford an apology for indifference and inaction. The smallest peg suffices to hang an excuse upon when we are anxious to escape from the stern service of faith. 'I pray thee have me excused,' is a request which was supported in the parable by the flimsiest of pretences, and discouragement makes one of the same sort. The sluggard's argument is on this wise, 'I will not attempt the work, for it is far too heavy for my poor strength. I fear the times are ill adapted to any special effort; indeed, I am not quite certain that success will ever attend the general work.' It is therefore a dreadful thing when the Christian church begins to be discouraged, and means must be used to stay the evil. Such means we would use this day. Lo, we lift the standard of the divine promise. 'Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people,' sounds out like a silver trumpet in the front of the host. Be encouraged, O ye of the faint heart; there are no more difficulties now than there were of old. The cause is no more in jeopardy than it was a thousand years ago. The result, the end, the consummation of all things is absolutely certain: it is in his hand who cannot fail, therefore be of good courage, and in waiting upon the Lord renew your strength.

Remember, ye that are cast down, that there are other voices besides those of the bittern and owl from the 'waste places.' My text has near to it twice, nay, three times, 'HEARKEN TO ME.' You have listened long enough to dreary suggestions from within, to gloomy prophecies from desponding friends, to the taunts of foes, and to the horrible whisperings of Satan: now hearken to him who promises to make the wilderness like Eden, and the desert like the garden of the Lord.

O ye whose eyes are quick to discover evil, there are other sights in the world besides waste places and deserts, and hence my text hath near to it twice over the exhortation, 'LOOK' 'Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn'; 'Look unto Abraham your father.' Why should your eyes for ever ache over desolations? Probably you have seen as much in the wilderness as you are ever likely to see there. It does not take long to discover all the treasures and comforts of the burning sand; you have probably discovered them all by now. As for the discomforts and wants of the desert, you are perhaps as well acquainted with them as you need to be. Gaze no longer at the thirsty land and the burning sky; turn your eye where the finger of the Lord points by his word. If we enquire what it is that the Lord would have us observe, he answers, 'Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you'; for there we may find comfort. O for the presence of the Holy Spirit, that the word may be full of the dew of heaven to refresh our souls.

I. We shall first look towards Abraham that we may see in him THE ORIGINAL OF GOD'S ANCIENT PEOPLE, the foundation stone, as it were, of the dispensation by which God blessed the former ages. In Judah was God known, his name was great in Israel: let us look to the rock whence Israel and Judah were hewn.

We observe, first, that the founder of God's first people was called out of a heathen family. 'Your fathers,' says Joshua, 'dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and they served other gods.' Abraham, the founder of the great system in which God was pleased to reveal himself for so long a time, and to whose seed the oracles of God were committed, was a dweller in Ur of the Chaldees, the city of the moon-god. We cannot tell to what extent he was actually engrossed in the superstition of his fathers, but it is certain that the family was years afterwards tainted with idolatry; for in Jacob's day the teraph was still venerated, and Rachel stole her father's images. Abraham, therefore, was called out from the place of his birth, and from the household to which he belonged, that in a separated condition, as a worshipper of the one God, he might keep the truth alive in the world. Recollect, then, that the first man from whom sprang that wondrous nation which God hath not even yet cast away was

originally himself an idolater, and had to be called out of his sinful state by effectual grace. Why, then, might not the Lord, if the cause of truth were this day reduced to its utmost extremity, again raise up a church out of one man? If an almost universal apostasy should hide the divine light, could he not kindle a torch among the heathen, and by its light illuminate the earth again? He could call out another Abraham, and bless him and increase him, and achieve the whole of his eternal purposes if all of us should sleep in the dust, and the visibly organised church of to-day should pass away as the snow of winter at the advent of spring. Is anything too hard for the Lord? Is he not able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham? As to anything like discouragement, it ought to vanish at the thought that not only out of your Sunday-schools, your colleges, and your pulpits can God raise up leaders for his church, but he can find them in the very centre of heathenism. Where Satan's seat is, even there can the Lord raise up advocates for his cause. The thick darkness of superstition shall not prevent the chosen one from seeing the light, neither shall the bondage of sin hold back the captive from finding freedom and proclaiming it to others.

'Ah,' you say, 'but men are not called now, as Abraham was, by miraculous calls from heaven.' I reply, 'The statement may be true; but God's visible means of calling men are now so many that there can seldom be need of miracle. The Lord can by his Spirit make one of the millions of Bibles scattered over the world to be as powerful a means of call as though he had sent an angel from heaven; yea, a solitary leaf of a printed tract, if wafted by the wind, or carried by the wave, may be borne where God shall bless it to the calling forth of a champion ordained of old to do great exploits. Where ordinary means are so plentiful wisdom resorts not to signs and wonders. Miracles were of admirable use while they were necessary; but now that they are no longer required the prudence of God forbids an extravagant display of the supernatural. Now that the word of God is scattered 'thick as leaves in Valambrosa' everywhere by willing and ready hands, what need can there be of voices of the day or visions of the night? The same Spirit who called Abraham by a supernatural voice can call others by the word of truth. Instead of regarding it as a prodigy that a man should be unexpectedly called out from among the heathen I look for it, and shall not be surprised to hear that in the remoter provinces of China, or in the centre of Thibet, or in the recesses of Africa men have been raised up to found churches for our Lord Jesus. God can through the printed page or by hints and rumours passed from hand to hand convey enough instruction to call out more Abrahams and bless them, and increase his kingdom by them. 'Omnipotence hath servants everywhere.' Let us never dream that the God of Abraham is short of means for calling out chosen men to build up his church. Surely Christian people should never doubt the power of God to raise up lights in dark places when we remember that the greatest preacher of the gospel, namely, the apostle Paul, was drafted into the army of Christ from the ranks of his direst foes. The proud Pharisee, a fanatic of the fanatics, embittered against Christ, and persecuting his people, became the earnest advocate of Christ Jesus. Aforetime his breath was threatening and slaughter, yet on the road to Damascus he was conquered and transformed. As a lion roareth over his prey, so did Paul rejoice that the saints in Damascus were now in his power; but the Lord struck him down, and turned the lion to a lamb, and henceforth where sin abounded grace did much more abound. First in the ranks of Christian heroes stands the man who called himself the chief of sinners because he persecuted the church of God. My brethren, as Luther came from among the monks, so out of Rome, yea, from the Vatican itself, can God, if he wills, call another Luther. The darkness of the times cannot forbid it, for God is Light. The weakness of the church cannot hinder it, for all power belongeth unto God. There may not be among us to-day one whom God will so greatly honour as to make him a spiritual father of nations; but there may be such a one in the courts of Whitechapel or in the rookeries of St. Giles. The Christ, who was himself called the Galilean, despises no place or people. Our king is not particular as to the mine from which he digs his gold. The great seeker of precious souls full often finds his purest pearls in the deepest and the blackest waters. Take this, then, for encouragement, ye who tremble for the

ark of God: he can build up a spiritual house for himself out of dark quarries, and find cedars for his temple in forests untraversed by the feet of missionaries.

'Ah,' say you, 'but Abraham was naturally a man of noble mould. Where do you find such a princely spirit as his?' I answer, Who made him? He that made him can make another like him. There is a grace of God which goes before what we are accustomed to call saving grace: I mean a grace of God which, in the creating of the nature, makes it a fit instrument for the grace which is after to be bestowed. By such sovereign favour one man is from his birth endowed with a superior mind and character, being adorned, even as a natural man, with much that is excellent in its own order. How often do you see among certain men of the world a generosity, honesty, open-heartedness, and nobility of disposition which are not grace, but which mark men out as fit to be leaders in all that is good when grace calls them into the divine service? The Lord can just as soon make a man after the type of Abraham as after any other type; and doubtless he has such in store even now, to whom his call will yet come. We may expect to see men of strong convictions converted into believers who 'stagger not at the promise through unbelief.' From among priests and pagans we may hope that the Lord will raise up pillars for his church. Is not this hope encouraged in your breasts as you 'Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you'?

Look again and observe that Abraham was but one man. Do not be startled at the sound which seems to have such terrors for certain brethren. I have heard the cant of those who object to a 'one-man ministry,' a ministry to which all the while they usually submit in their own meetings; but to my ear there is music, and not terror, in the term 'a one-man ministry.' I bless God that all my hope of salvation hangs upon the divine ministry of the One Man. Is not Christ, as the servant of God, the very pattern of all ministries which are of God? Working out the Father's eternal purpose by a life which was necessarily unique in many points, he trod the wine-press alone; in this, however, he causes many of his people to have fellowship with him, even as in the case of Paul, who says, 'At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me.' I am bold also to say that the Lord has as a rule wrought more nobly by one man than by bands and corporations of men. He in whose seed all nations are blessed was but one. 'I called him,' saith he, 'alone, and blessed him, and increased him.' Nor is this a solitary instance. When the earth was utterly corrupt God conserved the race by a solitary preacher of righteousness, who prepared an ark for the saving of his house. See how one Joseph saved whole nations from famine, and one Moses brought out a race from bondage. Who was there to keep Israel right when Moses fell on sleep but the one man Joshua? What were the prosperous times in the era of the Judges but days when one man was to the front as a leader? When all the rest hid away in dens and caves, some Barak or Gideon, or Jephthah, or Samson came boldly forward and delivered Israel. One man, standing like a figure at the head of many ciphers, soon headed victorious thousands, through faith in God. What was there but one man in the days of David? The Philistines had still triumphed over the land if the one lad had not brought back Goliath's head, and if the one man had not again and again smitten the uncircumcised in the name of the Lord. Beloved, if we should ever be reduced, as we shall not be, to one man, yet by one man will God preserve his church, and work out his great purposes. I hope we shall never go into our chamber, and shut to the door, and cry with Elias, 'I only am left, and they seek my life!' No, my brother, there are more faithful men in this world than you. The Lord has yet reserved to himself his thousands that have not bowed the knee to Baal. We are this day, not one man, but many, and we all desire to live for the glory of God, and for the spread of his gospel; but if our hosts were so diminished that we could be numbered by a little child upon his fingers, still there would be no excuse for dismay, for the God of Abraham still liveth, even he who created a people to his praise by one man, of whom he says, 'I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him.'

Think, my brethren, of the power for good or evil which may be enshrined in a single human life. What mischievous results may come of one man! One sinner destroyeth much good, and if there were but one person left who had knowledge of the ways of vice and the words of blasphemy that one man would suffice to infect the race with his abominations. If evil be so mighty, is not good with God in it quite as powerful? We may rightly measure quantities in reference to many things, but with others it is absurd. It would be ridiculous to measure the power of fire by the quantity which burns on our hearth. Give us fit materials and a single match, and you shall see what fire can do. If ordinary fire, that may so readily be extinguished, is thus powerful, who shall venture to measure the power of the fire from heaven, which neither men nor devils can quench, the fire which fell at Pentecost, and burns among us still. Ye carry fire, ye servants of God; ye work with a heaven-sent force of boundless energy. Why, therefore, should you despair? If all the lights in the world were put out except a solitary lamp, there is enough fire in one wick to kindle all the lamps in the universe. What inch of ground remains for despair to stand upon?

Furthermore, we are bound to notice that this one man was a lone man. He had not only to do the work of God, but he had nobody to help him. 'I called him alone.' True, he was attended by Lot—a poor miserable lot he was, costing his noble uncle more trouble than he ever brought him profit. How little did he maintain or adorn the righteousness which, nevertheless, had saved him; true type of many a feeble professor in these days. Abraham was not backed by any society when he crossed the Euphrates and afterwards traversed the desert to sojourn in Canaan as a pilgrim and a stranger. If ever man was fairly cut adrift and cast upon the Lord it was the great father of the faithful. He certainly found no patronage in his onward course save the all-sufficient patronage of the Lord his God. When he came near to kings it was a source of trouble to him; it led to contention, and once to war; or else he felt bound to refuse their offers of gifts, and say as he did to the king of Sodom, 'I will not take from a thread even to a shoe-latchet, and I will not take anything that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich.' That same boastful sentence might be uttered by the State concerning some churches that I know of, but not concerning us: may God preserve us, my brethren, from every desire to come under obligations to earthly sovereignties, lest, becoming indebted to them, we should be bound to render suit and service at their bidding, such service being already due to 'another king, one Jesus.'

Abraham had no prestige of parentage, rank, or title. If you had looked at the stately patriarch when he trod the plains of Mamre you would have seen about him a presence, a calm dignity, a truly regal manner; but that came to him solely through his faith in God and his communion with heaven. Abraham was distinguished from other men only by the grace of God. What grander difference can there be than that which is established by the existence of faith in the heart? Thus Abraham was in the fullest sense a lone man, unsupported by any of those outward distinctions which enable some men to do more than others.

The fulfilment of his calling rested on his loneliness; for he must get away from his kindred, and wander up and down with his flocks, even as the church of God now does, dwelling in a strange land, and feeding her flock apart. When he was alone God blessed Abraham, 'I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him.' The blessing did not come to him in Charran while he still had some connection with the old stock; he was not yet become thoroughly nonconformist, but held in some small degree to the old house at home, and till the last link was snapped the blessing could not come. And now, my brother, if in the town or district where you live you seem to lose all your helpers; if they die one by one, and it seems as if nobody would be left to you; if even the prayer-meeting fails for want of earnest, pleading men, still persevere, for it is the lone man that God will bless. 'He setteth the solitary in families.' In your present forlorn condition you are learning sympathy with that lone man in Gethsemane, with that lone man upon

the cross, who there vanquished all your foes. Remember that your enemies are thus beaten before you encounter them, and therefore you may readily overcome through the blood of the Lamb. Oh, be not afraid. Thus saith the Lord 'I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him.' Grasp that, ye that dwell remote from human sympathy. Oh that our missionaries abroad may feel the rich comfort of this fact; for they full often, like lone sentinels, keep watch with eyes that long to see a friend. They are separated from intercourse with brethren, they miss the friendships which tend to comfort and confirm, but it is God that calls them alone, and he will bless them and increase them. The purer churches of to-day, standing alone as they do, because they dare not make unholy alliances with any, 'standing alone, I say, in simple trust in the living Lord' ought not to be afraid with any amazement, but attempt great things for God and expect great things from God.

Once more, I cannot help asking your attention to the fact that Abraham was not only a man called from heathendom, one man, and a lone man; but he was a man who had to be stripped yet further. The blessing was 'Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee,' but the manifest fulfilment of it was not by-and-by. As we have already seen, he must come away from his kindred and his father's house, and he must dwell in Palestine till the promised seed was born. But how long he waited for the expected heir! Twenty, yes, almost thirty years rolled away, and the man Abraham was ninety years old and nine. He is very old; and yet he is to be blessed with a son. He must number the full tale of a hundred years before Isaac can be born. This promised child was to be according to promise, and therefore it could not be born till nature was recognised as spent. As for Sarah it was not possible that she should become a mother at her advanced age, and yet it must be so, for God had said it.

The believing pair had waited on till in an evil hour Sarah suggested a desperate attempt to fulfil the promise, in which she still firmly believed. That artifice broke down; it was a part of the divine plan that it should do so. The covenant promise was not to the seed after the flesh. When that scheme had been set aside, the Lord in his own time fulfilled his word.

Joy! joy! in the house of Abraham and Sarah. What a feast there was that Isaac was born, filling the house with laughter. But he must die! 'Get thee up,' said God, 'and take thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and offer him for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.' The grand old man will do it. He will get up early in the morning, and the father and the son will journey together silently; for the aged heart is too full to talk. He believes God, and is sure that even if he should actually slay his son at God's command the promise would somehow be kept. Abraham could not tell how, but it was no business of his to tell how; he was fully persuaded that what God had promised he was able to perform. God had said to him 'In Isaac shall thy seed be called,' and he believed that God could raise Isaac from the dead, or in some other way achieve the promise. Thus he grasped the resurrection. He laid hold on a truth which was deeper than he knew of: by his faith he realised resurrection for Isaac though as yet the Lord Jesus had not shown the way by his own rising from the dead. What a stripping Abraham had endured! Who can describe what would have been the wretchedness of that aged parent if it had not been for his faith! Men intensely love the children of their old age. See how a grandchild is fondled by his grandsire, and thus must Isaac have been loved of Abraham and yet he must die by his father's own hand. Oh, most miserable among the miserable must he have been who stood there on Mount Moriah, called to such a duty, his heart breaking while his soul obeyed. Such, doubtless, would have been the case had not faith been his stay. Look, then, to Abraham your father, and say is he not the greatest of men, the grandest human representative of the great Father God himself, who in the fullness of time spared not his own Son, but freely delivered him up for us all? Likest to God among mortal men art thou Abraham, and

therefore well mightest thou be his friend! In thy trial brought to such a stripping we may yet envy thee as we hear the Lord saying, 'Now know I that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.' Now, if in all these trials Abraham was yet blessed, and God's purposes were accomplished in him, can we not believe that the same God can work by us also, despite our downcastings and humiliations? When we are utterly broken and crushed may not the Lord's strength be made perfect in our weakness? Let us not question the promise because of our personal deadness and inability, but believe God without wavering, for he hath said, 'My grace is sufficient for thee.'

Now, brothers and sisters, here is the sum and substance of this first head of my discourse: in looking to the rock whence we are hewn, we have to see the Lord working the greatest results from apparently inadequate causes. This teaches us to cease from calculating means, possibilities, and probabilities, for we have to deal with God, with whom all things are possible. Almighty God can assuredly do whatever he says he will do. Who is to hinder him? Let the voice ring out over all the earth, and let it be heard in hell itself who shall stay the arm of God when he wills to achieve a thing? He fears no opposition, and he needs no help. Of what did he make the world? With whom took he counsel? Who instructed him? And, if all the things that are have been spoken into existence by God alone, by his mere word, can he not yet build up his church, even if on her earthly side there should seem to be no material with which to raise her walls? Consider creation and remark what God hath wrought. See how all the millions of mankind have sprung from a single pair, because God blessed them in the beginning. But I must not multiply illustrations from nature or from history, for they rise spontaneously before your own minds. Refresh your faith by a reference to our own island history. If you would firmly believe in the conversion of the heathen remember what your fathers were when bloody rites were performed in the oak woods or amid the huge monoliths of Stonehenge. The Druidic system was as cruel and degrading as any that now curses a savage people; but the heralds of Jesus conquered. Where are the gods of the Druids now? Who reverences the golden sickle and the sacred oak? The thing is gone, as though it never had been. Why, then, should not other evil idolatries pass away? Look again at the triumph of Protestantism in this country. What was it at first? A thing utterly despised and hunted down. The stakes of Smithfield cannot be forgotten by those who dwell so near the spot. Yet, despite all, the gospel of God triumphed, and rood, and pyx, and image were broken in contempt. Let the days of the Puritans, the palmy days when God was known in England, tell how thoroughly Bible truth won the victory. Why not again? Why not everywhere? If you desire another illustration, look at our own body of Christians? History has hitherto been written by our enemies, who never would have kept a single fact about us upon the record if they could have helped it, and yet it leaks out every now and then that certain poor people called Anabaptists were brought up for condemnation. From the days of Henry II. to those of Elizabeth we hear of certain unhappy heretics who were hated of all men for the truth's sake which was in them. We read of poor men and women, with their garments cut short, turned out into the fields to perish in the cold, and anon of others who were burnt at Newington for the crime of Anabaptism. Long before your Protestants were known of, these horrible Anabaptists, as they were unjustly called, were protesting for the 'one Lord, one faith, and one baptism.' No sooner did the visible church begin to depart from the gospel than these men arose to keep fast by the good old way. The priests and monks wished for peace and slumber, but there was always a Baptist or a Lollard tickling men's ears with holy Scripture, and calling their attention to the errors of the times. They were a poor, persecuted tribe. The halter was thought to be too good for them. At times ill-written history would have us think that they died out, so well had the wolf done his work on the sheep. Yet here we are, blessed and multiplied; and Newington sees other scenes from Sabbath to Sabbath. As I think of your numbers and efforts, I can only say in wonder 'What a growth! As I think of the multitudes of our brethren in America, I may well say, What hath God wrought? Our history forbids discouragement. Never cause more hopeless

once; none more hopeful to-day! It matters little what may yet happen, the cause is safe. What if all our Baptist organisations expire! What if but one man should be left faithful to the old banner, our Captain would yet triumph gloriously, for he saveth not by many nor by few. Though all else faileth, the Lord shall reign for ever and ever. This is the lesson which, I pray, we may all of us learn, and then, by faith, go forth to act upon it.

II. With great brevity, I shall dwell for a moment upon the second point, namely 'THE MAIN CHARACTERISTIC OF THIS CHOSEN MAN. The text says, 'Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you,' and it must mean, 'consider him and see what he was, that you may learn from him. You perceive at once that his grand characteristic was his faith. In this faith many other most brilliant qualities are comprehended, but his faith lay at the bottom of all. Here is his epitaph: "Abraham believed God." That was a mainspring of all his acts, the glory of his life, 'Abraham believed God.' The men that God will work by, whatever else they have not, must have faith in God. Though it is to be desired that the believer should have every mental and moral qualification, yet it is astounding how, if there be real faith, a multitude of imperfections are swallowed up, and the man is still a power. I would mention Samson as an extreme case. He was the feeblest of men, and the least fitted to be a judge in Israel; but oh, what faith! And what wonders it achieved! A thousand men! He is like a child in his belief that God is with him. He never calculates at all; it is all the same to him whether there are a thousand or one. He flings himself upon the host, and has slain them before we can realise the deadly odds. A sword; no, he has no sword: an old jawbone of an ass is quite enough for an arm which God strengthens. See how he smites them, hip and thigh, till they lie in heaps before him. I do not suppose that it would have signified to Samson if there had been a million Philistines: with a thousand to one, a man is so thoroughly outnumbered that numbers cease to count. Here was an impossibility before him, and what could be worse. Brethren, when you do get off your feet, and must swim, you may as well have fifty fathoms of water beneath you as not, for you can but drown. In the case of faith, drowning is out of the question, and swimming is good in deep water, for there is no fear of striking against a rock. Faith glories in difficulties and infirmities, because the power of God doth rest upon her. If the work is barely possible to her strength faith hardly likes it; but she gets into her sphere when in trials far beyond human strength she laughs at impossibility, and cries, 'It shall be done.'

Abraham's faith was such that it led him to obedience. He was called to go out, and he went, not knowing whither he went. His faith through grace led him to perseverance; for once in God's way he did not leave it, but still abode a sojourner with God. His faith led him to expectancy; he looked for the promised seed, and not only for an Isaac but for the Messiah. So clear was the vision of his expectancy that before his eyes Christ was set forth, visibly. Did not the Saviour, who knew all things, say, 'Abraham saw my day; he saw it, and was glad'?

The like faith also dwelt in the breast of Sarah; and, as we are told in the text to look to Sarah as well as Abraham, let us not fail to do so. The faith of Sarah was not little when she left home with her husband; forsaking her kith and kin from love to God, and to him whom she called 'lord.' She acted as if she had said to the great patriarch, 'Where thou goest I will go; where thou dwellest I will dwell, for thy God is my God.' Nor did the trial of her faith end with the moving, she had to take up with tent-life and all its inconveniences. It is the woman that knows the discomfort of domestic life under such circumstances. We never hear that she complained for a moment, though the cold of winter and the heat of summer are neither of them warded off by a tent. How readily she entertained her husband's guests. Though they might drop in at most unseasonable hours, or call her to bake bread in the heat of the day, she was glad to

welcome strangers, for like her husband she was given to hospitality. I saw you smile, dear friends, when I mentioned domestic matters; but to me it is the solemnity of faith that men and women can not only pray and sing, but can put up with household discomforts out of obedience to God. Certain people look upon faith as a fine, airy, sentimental thing with which to roam among the stars, anticipate millenniums, and enjoy yourself in lofty contemplation. I believe far more in a faith which, whether it eats or drinks, does all to the glory of God; faith which like Sarah dwells in the tent and works there; faith which is cheerful over a scanty meal and drives away the fear of want; faith which can come down in life from the mansion to the cottage, if providence so decrees. From Abraham's comfortable home at Ur to his gipsy wanderings in Palestine the change must have been great, but Abraham may not have felt it one half as much as Sarah, for men can rough it and live out of doors, but the housewife knows all about it, and great was her Faith that she never raised a question about the propriety of her husband's course of life: and though she laughed when she was told that she should bear a son, yet remember that in the eleventh of Hebrews it is written "Through faith also Sarah herself received strength." She was the mother of Isaac, not in the power of the flesh, but through the energy of faith, therefore look at her as the text bids you.

Christian men and Christian women, mark well this fact that the characteristic of the person whom God will bless is that he believes and acts upon his belief. Without faith it is impossible to please God; but the man of faith is God's man. And why is this? I answer, because faith is the only faculty of our spirit which can grasp God's ideal. The greatest man, without faith, cannot tread in the divine footsteps. The ideas of God are as high above us as the heavens are above the earth: and therefore it is not by any fancied vastness of our feeble minds that we can ever rise into fellowship with God. Faith in the sight of God's thought whispers to herself "I cannot understand this great thing, nor need I wish to do so. What is my understanding? Perhaps I trust to it too much already. I am called to do what God bids me, without knowing why, and I am glad it is so, for now I can worship him by bowing before his sovereign will." There is a capacity about faith for grasping divine promises and purposes, a width, a breadth, a height, a depth, which can hold the infinite truth as no other power can do. Love alone can rival it, for it embraces the infinite God himself. With the far-reaching plans and promises of God faith alone is fit to deal; carnal reason is altogether out of the lists.

Faith, too, has a great power of reception, and therein lies much of her adaptation to the divine purpose. Self-confidence, courage, resolution, cool reasoning, whatever else they are good at, are bad at humbly receiving. Those vessels which are full already are of no use as receivers; but faith presents her emptiness to God, and opens her mouth that God may fill it. Mercy needs not a jewel, but a casket into which to put her gems, and faith is exactly what she wants.

Then, again, faith always uses the strength that God gives her. Pride would vapour with it, and doubt would evaporate it; but faith is practical, and economically uses the talent entrusted to her. Faith has already spent all her own strength, and she so yearns to achieve her purposes that she uses all the power that God will lend her. Faith eats her manna and leaves not a morsel for worms to breed in.

Faith, too, can wait the Lord's time and place. When faith is weak men are in a dreadful hurry, but strong faith does not judge the Lord to be slack concerning his promise. As God achieves his purpose with infinite leisure, he loves a faith that is patient and looks not for its reward this day or the next. 'He that believeth shall not make haste': that is to say, he shall not be ashamed or confounded by present trials so as to rush upon unbelieving actions. Faith leaves times and seasons with God to whom they belong.

God loveth faith and blesseth it too, because it giveth him all the glory. The true believer will not allow a trace of self-glory to linger on his hands. 'Where is boasting then?' was a question once asked in the house of faith, and the searchers examined every nook and corner in every chamber to find it, but they found it not. Then they said to faith, 'Where is boasting?' She answered, 'I shut him out.' 'It is excluded,' shut out, and the door fastened in its face. You do not believe God if you boast of what you are doing: least of all do you believe if you pride yourself in your faith, for faith is not mistrustful of her God but of herself. Faith looks to God to keep her alive as well as to fulfil the promise that he has made to her. This then is the kind of faith which was characteristic of Abraham, and the question is, have we got it? Have we so much of it that God can largely bless us? The comfort is that, if we have it not, the author of faith can give it to us, and if we have it in scant measure he can increase our faith.

Is not this a solid reason why you and I should take heart? You who do not believe that missions will succeed; you who readily become discouraged and discourage others; I beg you go home and seek more faith. We cannot go down to the battle with such soldiers as you; you do but encumber the host. The men that lapped are the only ones that Gideon will take to war. Send the fearful ones to the rear and let them take care of the baggage, so that when the battle is won they may have a share of the spoil, according to David's law. For actual service and warfare we must have men of faith. Cromwell found that when his men came dressed in all sorts of suits and colours they were apt to injure one another in the melee, and so he put them all in uniform. The uniform of the Prince Immanuel is faith: no man may call himself a soldier of the cross who hath it not. This is the victory which overcometh the world, even your faith. Brother ministers, let us take heed lest we be found qualified for our ministry in all respects except this one. You have learning, eloquence, industry, honesty, but do you so believe in God as to expect his word to act divinely on men's hearts. Do you preach believingly? Do you pray believingly? I leave the question with you.

III. I have shown you, dear friends, that God effected his purpose, and raised up a chosen nation out of one man, whose chief characteristic was his faith: and now I want you to notice OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THAT ONE MAN. I dwelt upon that while reading the chapter (Romans 4.) There is a relation between us and Abraham even as Paul assures us in the epistle to the Galatians, 'Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.' Something, surely, is expected of the children of such a man as Abraham. O, for shame, thou unbelieving one! Is Abraham thy father? Art thou one of the faithful seed? Great mountains are often succeeded by low valleys. Perhaps that is the case with you; but it should not be so. The natural seed were cut off because they had no faith, let not those who are grafted in, think to do without it. It is by faith that you are a son at all. You disprove your pedigree if you tolerate unbelief. Oh! let nobody find fault with Abraham through you, and surely they may do so if they find you staggering. That staggering is a shocking business: staggering at God's promises is terrible. Abraham staggered not at the promise through unbelief. May we never dishonour the right noble grace of faith, but so believe that all men may know Abraham's God to be our God. O for abounding spiritual life, for the God of Abraham is not the God of the dead but of the living; and we can only live unto God by faith.

Brethren, because we are the seed of Abraham, the apostle declares that the blessing of Abraham has come upon us also. I pray that all the friends and labourers in our Missionary Society may grasp the blessing of Abraham. What is it? It is a covenant favour that belongs to all who are the servants of God by faith. Here is the substance of it: 'Surely blessing, I will bless thee, and in multiplying, I will multiply thee.' That is the grand old covenant promise and it belongs to the church. Note that the blessing is attended with multiplying. Some friends are afraid of statistics which represent the increase of the churches; I am far

more afraid of those statistics which will show that we do not increase as we could wish. The blessing of the church is the increase of the church. The two go together: 'Blessing, I will bless thee, and in multiplying, I will multiply thee.' How much are Christians to be multiplied in the world? At the present moment we do not seem to be increasing as fast as the population. I am afraid that the number of converted persons relatively to the population is scarcely as great as it was thirty years ago; we long to be multiplied at a very different rate from this'and we shall be if we have faith in our God. Hear ye the covenant word: 'Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.' These are lines from the covenant, which is sure to all the seed and can never be broken. We have been called and blessed, and it is of necessity that we increase also. We are bound to increase; we are destined to overrun the nations; the Hittites, the Hivites, the Amorites, of Popery, Mahometanism, and Idolatry are in the land, but their false systems are utterly to perish. Jesus at the head of his people shall drive them out'I mean not the men, but their evil beliefs. They may take notice to quit, for he is coming before whom all men must bow. O that ere he himself shall appear his spiritual presence in the midst of his church might suffice for victory, that all mankind might call him blessed. We are bound to increase, till the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for us, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. Upon the church in her vigour shall yet descend the blessings of the tribes of Joseph. 'His glory is like the firstling of his bullock, and his horns are like the horns of unicorns: with them he shall push the people together to the ends of the earth.' The success of truth is the battle of the Lord, and the increase of his church is according to his own promise, therefore in quietness we may possess our souls.

IV. Last of all consider for a minute OUR POSITION BEFORE ABRAHAM'S GOD. Do not let anything that I have said about Abraham for a moment take your mind off from the Lord himself, because the pith of it all lies here,'I called him alone.' Look to Abraham, but only as to the rock from which the Lord quarried his people:' your main thought must be Jehovah himself. 'I, I called him alone, and blessed him.' 'I the Lord do all these things.' Look unto the everlasting God who doeth great wonders, and stay yourselves upon him.

Let us joyfully recollect that the Lord our God has not changed, nay, not in one jot or tittle. He is 'the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.' There is so far a change in the revelation of him, that it is brighter now in the person of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, than it could have been through seer and vision; but that should be a motive for increased faith. 'His arm is not shortened that he cannot save, neither is his ear heavy that he cannot hear.' This God of Abraham is still almighty, and still in the midst of the covenanted ones. If the ages that have passed over his awful brow could wrinkle it and his strength could decay, then might we also decline in our confidence; but it is not so. He fainteth not, neither is weary. Our behaviour towards him, therefore, should resemble that of Abraham; and especially, representing, as we do many of us, the churches of Jesus Christ as ministers or deacons, we must never dishonour the Lord by unbelief. Doubt everything but God. Let God be true and every man a liar. This the everlasting decree which none can change,'Christ must reign; he shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied; the kings of the earth must bow before him. Do not doubt it, for God hath sworn by his own life that all flesh shall see his glory. Here is the grand argument for strong faith.

Notice next that the covenant of God has not changed. God hath not recalled his words, nor taken a pen and struck out his promises from the record. Read the covenant words, and write them upon the doorposts of your mission-house, 'In blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.' This is the covenant with the one spiritual seed of Abraham, that is the marrow of it, and

it has never been revoked. As I have said before, we read it now in clearer light, and understand better the fullness of its provisions, but the covenant is not disannulled. Let us go to God with any one promise of it, and we can say to him, 'This is thy promise in Christ Jesus; and thou hast not spoken in secret in a dark place and withdrawn thy word and said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye my face in vain.' Such pleading will prevail. He will never run back from his word. Has he said, and will he not do it? Therefore let us cry, 'Remember thy word unto thy servant upon which thou hast caused me to hope.'

But there is this also to be added, that this work which we desire the Lord to do is in some respects even less than that which he has done with Abraham. What ask we? Not that he should begin with one man to build up a nation, or create a church? No, but that Zion being builded, he should comfort her, and cause her waste places to rejoice. The field is the world, and the seed is ready for the sowing. The gospel is in the hands of those who have the best means of spreading it. Everything is ready for its ultimate triumph. The train is laid; we only need the heavenly fire to touch it, and the deed is accomplished. O that the work of the Lord may be speedily done; that the Lord may carry on his work of righteousness and make a short work in the earth. I say that if God has done this greater thing, if he has excavated a nation from the quarry of Abraham, we may well expect the self-same God to keep his covenant, to multiply his church, and build her up after the similitude of a palace. The time to favour Zion, even the set time, has come. Beside that; we have been already visited by God as Abraham had not been when first he was called. Abraham had not known the Lord till he called him, but our Sion is familiar with God, for she is the city of the great king. He dwelleth in our midst by his Holy Spirit, and holy hymn and prayer rise every day from the multitudes that fear him. The Lord hath redeemed, and justified, and saved his people, and surely we may look to him to refresh and revive his heritage.

What marvellous things hath God done on the face of the earth since Abraham's days! the stupendous marvel of incarnation, the height and depth of which none of us can measure; the wondrous work of redemption, the highest, grandest, divinest achievement of the Deity! all this is done; what may we not expect after this? You know more of God than Abraham could know; I beseech you then, trust him, at least up to the level of the patriarch. How shall we forge an excuse if we do not? What can excuse us if we distrust so glorious a God.

Brethren, it remains for me only to add this practical word. Let us throw ourselves more and more upon our God. If you have any work appointed you of the Lord, and it is within the compass of your strength, shame upon you if you do not perform it at once; but if it be beyond you, herein will God be glorified if you do it by his power. If there remaineth no might, wit, or wisdom in you, if you are deeply conscious of your weakness you are by this experience made the more fit to be used of the Lord, for when we are weak then are we strong. If you have confidence in God all things are possible to him that believeth. Oh, when will the church cast herself upon her God as men throw themselves into the stream when they mean to swim? They seek no longer for foothold, their foot leaves the spot whereon it rested, and they throw themselves trustfully upon the wave. The everlasting ocean of love and power is ready to upbear us: we shall swim gallantly to shore if we will but trust this blessed sea of love.

Let us begin to believe God and then let us act in daily life as if we believed him. The just shall live by faith. Some people have a faith which is for show, a Sunday faith, faith that cannot bear the wear and tear of every day life; varnished and gilded, but with no pure metal in it. The faith of Abraham could lead strings of camels and flocks of sheep away from Haran to Canaan. His was the faith which could drive the tent-pin into a foreign soil, or roll up the canvas and seek another unknown halting place. The faith of Abraham is a faith that saith to wayfaring men, 'Turn in, and I will get you a little water and wash your feet.' It is a

practical, active, living, week-day, everyday faith. I will speak very broadly and plainly, and say we need a bread-and-cheese faith, that is to say, a faith which believes that God who feeds the ravens will send us our daily bread; a faith which believes that the heavenly Father who clothes the lilies will much more clothe his children; the faith that can believe God about the things that are actually around it, and that does not live in the region of fiction. See how God blessed Abraham with flocks and herds, and everything temporal as well as spiritual, because he walked in reference to these things along the line of faith; gave Lot his choice of pasturage, refused the offer of the king of Sodom, and resolutely paid the children of Heth the full price for the cave and the field. If we walk by faith in business life God may not in every case bless us with abundance of temporal mercies, but assuredly we shall be blessed. He may send us adversity, and poverty, but in these things faith is more than conqueror, glorying in tribulations also.

In the Lord's work of evangelising the world you must have a downright, practical faith; not a faith that will sing when the organ begins to play, and then be so busy fumbling the hymn paper as to forget the collection: not the faith of those who boast of Carey, and Marshman, and Knibb, but whose own names never appear in the subscription list for a single shilling: not a faith which sings'

'Fly abroad thou mighty Gospel.'

but never lends a bit of down to make a feather for its wings.

Let us hear the scripture, as it says, 'Hearken! 'If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, 'Hearken!' for you may hear the Sabbath bells ringing in the everlasting peace, and angel songs welcoming the reign of grace over all nations. Let the ears of deaf unbelief be unstopped, for the whole earth echoes with the praises of the Lord. Say not that the day is distant. Hearken! Let faith be the listener, and she will hear across the ages which divide us from the gladsome period. Then shall you listen all day and all night long for many a year, but never hear the roll of drum or roar of cannon. Hearken! Ye shall hear from the islands of the sea, and from the once benighted continents, psalms and hymns, and holy songs, ascending unto the one Jehovah and to his Christ. Hearken! for ears were never gladdened with sweeter music.

Then look! till you see the temples of false gods crumbling into dust. See how the shrines are tottering, and the idols breaking as though smitten with a rod of iron. Mohammed's crescent wanes, never to wax again; and she, of the Seven Hills, is hated of the kings, and they burn her with fire. 'Come, behold the works of the Lord, what desolations he hath made in the earth! 'Thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy. They fall! They fall! They are as the slain. The day breaketh, and the shadows flee away. O ye watchers that look for the dawning, fall not asleep through sorrowful weariness. The morning cometh. It shall not tarry. Do you doubt it? Know ye not that the Lord reigneth? Is he not the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. 'The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.' If you doubt it, dissolve your Missionary Society, and do not pretend to do a work in which you have no faith; but if you believe in the triumph of God's work, and that you are called to it, behave worthily to so divine an enterprise. God do so to you as you deal with him in this matter. Amen.

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