

Faith Unto Enlargement Through Adversity - Part 5

by T. Austin-Sparks

The principle of circumcision is a sign of God's covenant with Abraham, representing a separation from the world and a renunciation of personal interests, which is applied by the Holy Spirit through patience and surrender.

Duration: 52:53

Scripture: Genesis 12:1, Joshua 24:2, Matthew 6:33, Philippians 1:20, Hebrews 11:8

Topics: "Adversity"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the importance of responding to God's call and separating oneself from personal interests. The example of Abraham is used to illustrate this point, highlighting how Abraham had to leave his country and sever his personal interests in order to fully follow God. The speaker also emphasizes the significance of patience in our spiritual journey, noting that being kept waiting can reveal our impatience and the need for discipline. The sermon concludes by mentioning the covenant sign of circumcision, which became a central aspect of Abraham's life and a symbol of his faithfulness to God.

Transcript

I bring you back again to the eleventh chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews, to the two statements regarding Abraham and his faith. First, in verse eight, By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed to go out unto a place which he was to receive for an inheritance, and he went out, not knowing whither he went. Verse seventeen, By faith Abraham, being tried, offered up Isaac.

Yea, he that had gladly received the promises was offering up his only begotten son, even he to whom it was said, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. Accounting that God is able to raise up even from the dead, from hence he did also in a figure receive him back. While we trust that what has already been said has been of real value and help, it has really been speaking in a very general way about these matters related to faith, what God is after in enlargement, establishment, and life.

We are now able to go further and see these things being worked out in the life experience of his people, individually and collectively, bringing these truths into practical application and relationship to life. So we return to this very practical outworking of truth in the life of Abraham. You know that Abraham's life can be gathered up into four things.

That is, faith in relation to God's purpose, faith in relation to God's principle, faith in relation to God's patience, and faith in relation to God's passion. We're not going to thoroughly examine and discuss those four things. That is a comprehensive statement that covers the whole life and the meaning of the whole life of Abraham.

We know, I think, without any further comment or explanation, what God's purpose was in calling Abraham. That is perfectly clear in the very statements that we have read from the book of Genesis. What the Lord said to him as to what he was going to do with him and through him, making of him a great nation, and from him a multitude of nations, and so forth and so on.

A great purpose to have a seed according to God's own heart. And into that purpose Abraham is called. But the realization of the divine purpose and the calling, you notice that's the word that is used, Abraham being called of God, the realization of that calling was along the line of many testings of faith.

I want to come this evening particularly to the second of those four things, faith and God's principle. We all know, that is all of us who know anything about Abraham, his life and history, given to us in both the Old and the New Testaments. We know that at a certain point in his relationship with God and God's dealings with him, a covenant sign was established in the form of a right which was indelibly registered in his flesh and became the covenant sign for all his seed.

And that covenant sign or right, which is called circumcision, became the central meaning of Abraham's life, the very basis of all the thoughts of God where he was concerned. Its significance, for it was after all only a sign, Paul makes it perfectly clear that this is not a right, but this is a principle. This significance of this sign of right gathered into it everything of God's meaning.

And the principle of the thing had already been at work in the life of Abraham before it was formulated into the definite act, sign or right. And it continued to be applied in principle right to the end of his life. That is, from the introduction of Abraham onto the platform of divine activities right on, not only through his life, but through the whole history of Israel and then taken up in its spiritual way in Christianity.

The significance, the meaning, the spiritual meaning of that right, that principle, is always the basis upon which God works. It is found here right at the beginning then with the introduction of Abraham into our known history. By faith, Abraham being called of God, Stephen said, the God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham when he was in Ur of the Chaldees.

Do you remember what the God of glory said to him? Do you remember the terms of the call? Get thee up, out from thy country and from thy kindred and from thy father's house unto a land that I will show thee. By faith, Abraham being called, obeyed. He went on.

The principle of circumcision began to work right at that point. It was faith's basic renunciation by which there began to be placed between an old life and relationship and set of things and an entirely new one. It was a severance, a cutting right in, a separation.

The principle began to work then. On the one side, Ur of the Chaldees and all that that meant was the ground of judgment. On the other side, the ground of righteousness.

The whole argument of Paul in his letter to the Romans about Abraham. From the ground of judgment to the ground of righteousness by a distinct act of severance. So far as God's mind was concerned, it was intended to be that.

Get thee out from thy country. Separation or severance from his country. Twenty-fourth chapter of the book of Joshua tells us that Israel see Abraham serve other gods beyond the Euphrates.

Recent excavations in Er have revealed a good deal about the times of Abraham. And amongst these uncoverings and disclosures it has come to light that in Er, in the times of Abraham, there were no fewer than five thousand names of gods. The names of five thousand gods who were worshipped by the people of Chaldea in Er.

Your fathers worshipped other gods beyond the river. Get thee out of thy country. The significance then is ride out from every other object and form of worship.

Ride out from anything and everything that shares the ground with God. Ride out from all that which disputes the right of God. That is the ground which lies under judgment.

Get thee out of thy country. Idolatry is a principle, not a form. When we speak about idolatry we usually conjure up in our minds or there is conjured up in our minds some forms of idols which the heathen worship, to which they bow down.

Or the icons and images of a false Christian system. Paganism and heathenism, wherever it is found, any kind, we think of that as idolatry. But no, no, no.

Idolatry is a far, far bigger thing than that. If there were five thousand in Arabic counties, there are fifty thousand in the world. They are everywhere.

They are here tonight. They are in your heart and in mine. That which challenges God's ground.

That which disputes the rights of God. That which divides between God and something else, that's idolatry. I say it's a principle, not just a form.

The principle is a very much bigger thing than a form. Just as the principle of circumcision is so much bigger than the right. That's what the New Testament is set to make clear.

Now this thing, this thing is something much more than a right in the body. This is something that ranges the whole realm of the flesh, the natural nature. In the out of thy country, this is far-going, drastic, tremendous, there's nothing outside.

From thy kindred and thy father's house, Ephraim started out from his country. As we know, instead of fulfilling the whole commandment, he took his kindred and his father's house with him. And so the journey was arrested.

Fact is, they moved to Haran, which was still in Chaldea, and still under the government of those gods, so that, even yet, they were still in that territory, on the ground of judgment, still in the place where God's rights were challenged and disputed. And so God said, we can't go any further. Why, there's anything of that left.

And the move never came until his father died. Now this may represent many things, but for our purpose tonight, I want to indicate that this means that we are we are not only called upon in an objective way to leave the world. The world has got to leave us.

You can take a certain position in an outward way in relation to Christianity, but you may have carried it all with you in your heart. See, that's what Israel did in the wilderness. They left Egypt, but Egypt hadn't left them.

Egypt was still in their hearts, and they were constantly harking back to Egypt, simply because Egypt was still in their hearts. And here it was. This has become no mechanical profession, no attachment and association in an outward way to the things of God.

This has got to become a matter of the heart. The father's house, the kindred, the sentimental associations, the affectional relationships, the deep down heredity connections. These have got to be settled.

It's got to be a fundamental and drastic renunciation out from thy country, thine kindred, thy father's house into a land that I will show thee. And when his father was dead, he moved. But he still took something of his kindred with him, which, until that was finally severed, was a constant nuisance to him.

A lot. Come back to that again. But, however, he did move into the land.

But here he is, moving up and down in the land, not possessing one foot of it. Very intense. In the land, but no possession.

Why? Well, I think for two reasons. Still something had got to be done in Abraham. But, on the other hand, the land itself was full of idolatry.

We know what the land was like at that time. Full of idolatry. So, on the one side, idolatry.

On the other side, idolatry. In between. A week.

And a long week. Before his feet could possess the land. You see, God is not realizing his full purpose while there is any idolatry at all on the right hand or on the left.

Anywhere. For God is establishing and standing by his irrevocable position, I am going to be all or nothing. Whether it be hell of the Chaldees or whether it be the land of Canaan, I am not going to share it with anybody.

And so, Abraham, I have got to bring you to the place where I am your all and you have nothing else. Before we can realize our full purpose. That's the principle of circumcision.

Of the right. Of the covenant. It's a deep cutting into.

It's a registration of a very, very drastic work of God. Paul says that it's the cross of the Lord Jesus. He puts the two together and says quite clearly the circumcision of the Old Testament and of Israel was only a type and symbol of the cross of the Lord Jesus.

By which this very utter separation is made between all the grounds where God's rights are challenged, disputed or reserved and the grounds where God is all. Now you notice that the process and the progress of this application of a principle was from without to within and ever more deeply within. From without, thy country.

That may be very much outward. And yet, and yet it's a very real thing. Unfortunately still although it may not be true here in this gathering maybe in some cases unfortunately we still have to use a phrase which is a contradiction in terms and a very, very terrible phrase it is when you think in the light of the cross of the Lord Jesus worldly Christian.

A worldly church. I say it's a contradiction in terms from God's standpoint there is no such thing and yet here it is. Where still in some form or other this idolatry that is in the world is associated with Christians and Christians are associated with it.

I dare not go into details but it's there. And perhaps the best way in which I can speak of it without going into details is this. You notice that when the Holy Spirit is allowed to work in a life on the principle of the cross of the Lord Jesus that is our death and burial with Him and our resurrection with Him the newness of life when He is allowed to apply the principle of the cross you see all sorts of things happening in the lives concerned.

Spontaneously they begin to change lots of things, lots of things. Things which shock those who long ago left that land of which at the beginning they seem to be hardly conscious but as time goes on and they are seeking to follow the Lord you notice they are dropping them. They are changing in appearance and in many other ways.

The ground that lies under judgment is coming under the Holy Spirit's conviction and these people say well the Lord has shown me He is not pleased with that. He doesn't agree with that. I think you know something about that.

It starts on the outside. Don't you think that you've got very far on when you begin to do that sort of thing? That's only the beginning. That's only leaving your country.

There's a lot more to be done yet but we won't get any farther until that's done. It'll be done. You hold the Lord up on some little matter like this.

It may be only dress. No, I am doing it. It may be a matter of make-believe.

Ah yes, ah yes. It's very sad. How much of this still clings to Christians? Oh, how I've been shocked and saddened in these past years.

It is. And it isn't a very advanced point to begin to deal with things like this. It's quite elementary.

Quite elementary. If you haven't dealt with those things you haven't got very far. But I'm not telling you you've got to go and deal with them.

The Holy Spirit's got to tell you that. Don't you do anything because I say you do. That's legalism.

But you ask the Lord that His Spirit may work in your heart on the principle of the cross of the Lord Jesus. You'll find the Holy Spirit will be quiet, no singling out things and there will be changes. That's only leading your country.

But it's moving from the outside, you see. The outside. And the progress and the process is from the outward to the inward.

Country and kindred. World. And the clinging of natural likes and dislikes.

Preferences. Sentimental attachment. Yes.

From the outward now to the inward. From the outward now to the inward. Things of the heart.

The Lord's getting inner. More and more to the inner, to the heart. He's going to press the thing right to the very heart and leave nothing.

Moving more and more inwardly. Thy country. Thy kindred.

That's getting inner. Those affectional relationships to which we cling. On that I'm not going to dwell.

Many, many a life has been held up and many another life has found its complete release by dealing with some affectional relationship. Oh, the tragedies, the tragedies of unequal marriage. Of Christians.

Of Christians. The unwillingness, you see, at a certain point before covenant was entered into to face this whole matter of common ground in the Lord. The awful tragedy that we are seeing every day.

On the other hand, suffering. Oh, the knife, the knife of circumcision applied to something in that realm. Some relationship which is not on the common ground of Christ.

Yet, very near to the heart, oh, the wonder of a release that has come and the knife has been taken to that in great suffering. Here, held up until it's done, the point with Abraham. Held up.

The whole purpose of God held up. Ah, this is applying principles in a practical way like this. So, the Lord goes on and the next phase, he's in the land.

He's in the land with no possession and this represents a still more inward movement of the knife. Was there some mixture in the heart of Abraham? It's not for me to say there was, to judge him, but I wonder from certain things that arise which I'll refer in a moment. Was there, after all, some mixture in his heart of ambition in relation to the divine call? The land that I will show thee and I will make of thee a great nation.

I'd like to be a great nation. I'd like to become something great. Is there ambition in the land? I say, I'm not charging Abraham with anything.

In the moment, in the next step, you'll see that there may be some justification for raising a question like this. That there may still have been just some personal interest associated with his act of obedience. Seeing something for self-realization.

Seeing something for himself in this way. Now, dear friends, whether it was true in Abraham's case or not, we don't know our own hearts. But you know, there does come into the whole matter of our relationship with the things of God to be of a personal interest.

This word, ambition. Oh, what pathetic stories can be told of the tragedy of ambition in the realm of the things of God. I have recently had very close and painful association with such a case.

I cannot give anything that would indicate where and who. But a situation like this. One went into what's called a ministry.

Married a wife who was tremendously ambitious for her husband. And did everything to get him on. And to get him up.

And he became actuated by this idea of getting on. And that man started with a real sense of divine things. And I tell you that, and this is the only detail that I can give that time, that he was closely associated with Oswald Chambers in the heyday of his ministry.

And I knew him then. We together had much fellowship and much talk about things of the Lord. And then this.

And by this ambition of his wife and his self, he got on. And got on. And got on.

And got to the very top. In one of the biggest of the denominations. Was granted a very high honour and a degree from a well-known university.

For his work. But he got it all. Not all.

Today that man has no assurance of salvation. He is a complete wreck. Mentally, physically, and spiritually.

And I have spent long and terrible hours trying to help him to bring his faith onto its feet. To believe God at all. Ambition.

In the realm of the things of God. You may say that's an extreme case. You see, it started just in a simple way at a certain point.

Some opportunity of an advantage. In the realm of God's things. And that led to the next.

Now God is going to have none of that in relation to his fulfillment. Let's be before God about ambition. Terrible, terrible snare.

In the end it can mean the frustration of all that God ever intended in our lives. He made himself of no reputation. Pressing inward.

Was this long waiting so to speak between the two worlds. The world of the past and the world of the promise. This marching up and down, living in tents.

Was it God's way of pressing circumcision more inward still over this matter of dividedness of interest. To really sever the last fragments of personal interest. Was it? Now look.

If that's true, that goes very inward, doesn't it? Take the matter of patience. You know, dear friends, the thing that will slay anything of that kind, ambition, more thoroughly than anything else, is being kept waiting. There is nothing that disciplines our motives more than being kept in suspense.

Being kept waiting. Or being made to know how impatient we are. How much patience we need.

So he had to be brought into one with God's patience. But being brought there, the sword was entering his soul. And searching out all this personal interest.

Now in order that you may see that I am not altogether imputing something wrong to Abraham, we come to the next. See, Isaac. Isaac.

Isaac became the point at which the point of the sword entered most deeply. Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, and offer him. Is this inward? Is this inward? Can anything ever be more inward

than that? No.

No. God has driven the thing right to its innermost point now. But why? Why? What is the explanation? Oh yes, I know that in principle and in figure God is bringing this man into fellowship with him in his own passion.

The offering of his own well-beloved and only son. Yes, but there's another factor. Do you remember when the Lord one day was speaking to Abraham, what Abraham said to the Lord? Yes.

In effect he said, yes, but that's all very well. But what wilt thou give me? Seeing I go childless, and that which is born in my house is not my child. What wilt thou give me? What wilt thou give me? God gave him, Isaac.

But God had to root out of that for me. Even so, this element of give me had got to be destroyed. And so Abraham called upon to give back to God to have the last fragment of me eliminated.

And then he got Isaac back. And there was no me in it at all. How inward is this work of the principle, isn't it? Yes, it is.

Well now, we need not stay much longer. We've got the thing clear. When it comes back to us, dear friends, you see what God wants.

What God is asking, where are we? It may be that there are some listening to this work who have not yet made the first response. Leave that which corresponds to the country. You're still on the ground where God has not got his place.

Where other lords have dominion. Where the principle of idolatry is at work in some way in your life, keeping you from responding to the divine call. Well, let me say this to you, that the great, vast purpose of God in Christ is that to which God calls you.

You are not called just to be Christian. You are not called just to say, I accept Christ as my Saviour. And to do what these other people called Christians do.

You are called with a great and immense calling, which is only complete in time and reaches to and over all the ages of the ages to come. That's the calling with which you are called. That's the calling.

Abraham, while he emerged at last into that of which I am speaking, in his life here on earth is only a figure of that. God said to Abraham, thy seed shall be the star of heaven, the sand of the sea shore, the form of multitude. Then I will give you, it had its literal fulfillment, but it's a figure, it's a type, after all, as the New Testament shows.

There's something very much more than that. Its full realization is in Christ. So the Apostle Paul makes clear.

We are called in Christ to the realization of a great eternal course. But nothing's possible until you've made that first response to the call, for death be out of thy country. It may be that there are some here tonight who have made that response.

They're no longer in that sense in the world. They have made a gesture and a movement, gone so far with the Lord, and stopped. Because there's still something in them of death from which they are not prepared

to separate.

Well, we can take it stage by stage, right up to the final application. My point is this, dear friends, taking it all together. Have any of us here tonight, have we really made this fundamental and complete renunciation? You see, there's something in this that is more than appears.

The Lord Jesus said this, the most drastic thing, whosoever there be of you, who will not renounce all that he has. He cannot be my disciple. Renounce all that he has.

Why? Why? You see, dear friends, if there's anything of that whatsoever, that is Satan's foothold in our life. Yes. It's Satan's foothold in our life.

It's dividing things with God. It is in effect saying, the Lord is not all. No one else or nothing else but the Lord.

Until it's like that. It's a hazardous Christian life. Our Christian life is in jeopardy.

The Lord says, for your own safety and for your own eternal future realization of my purpose, I must just be all that's left. You must have no God beside me. You must have nothing that divides the ground.

Isn't that right? See that man Paul there? We've quoted it. As always, so now, Christ may be magnified in my body whether by life or by death, for to me to live is Christ. The principle of circumcision is just this.

God having all the ground and nothing else. Being there to dispute it with me. To give God that ground calls for an act of faith.

By faith, Abraham. By faith, Abraham. And God is not going to give you anything that will undercut faith.

He will say it is yes. Now then, I tell you nothing about it. Unto a land which I will show you, he went out not knowing where he went.

God had not given him a rosy picture. Up to that time, God had not defined and described the inheritance. He simply said, I'll show you.

As you go on, I'll show you. When you've taken the step, I'll show you. In the meantime, not knowing, not knowing, not knowing.

Principle of faith. I believe that God having called me, God knows that it's worthwhile to call me to make such a renunciation. And that's all I want to know.

God doesn't do this sort of thing to get us into a trap, to deceive us, to rob us of anything at all, to lessen our lives, take anything away. God does this sort of thing because he is the God that he is. A purpose whose end is fullness.

That's all I want to know. Faith in God. Faith that believes that whatever it means, God means more.

I faith Abraham obeyed. Went out. Not knowing, but faithfulness.

God has called. And I believe that God never calls without some real justifying purpose. If it costs, the compensation must be far greater.

It must be because God is what he is. And I ask you, have all your gods of Calvary, been gods like that? Have they really filled your bills? Have they really satisfied you? Are you really content by holding on to that something? Are those some things? Are you? Oh no, you know you're not. You know you're not.

Well, the final word is this. All let us hasten to the point where we say the Lord. By God's grace it's going to be the Lord only.

It's not going to be just a move so far. And it's not going to be just another move so far and then stop. It's going to be by the grace of God all the way right to God's end.

No reserve. The Lord ought. Let him make that real.

And I say that if God ever says a thing, you can believe there's a great deal more behind it than appears in what he says. That's how I look at the Bible. If I find something in the Bible that is a statement or a requirement, a command or an exhortation, well on the face of it it says that's what's to be done.

Or that is what's not to be done. But I never stop there. I say why not? Oh why so? What God's got in his mind when he says that? Because God is not just giving us attitudes, little rules and regulations for our life.

God's got the immensity of all his full knowledge behind everything he says. There's such an immense reason behind the least thing that God says. It's as big as God himself.

So I want to know what's behind this. What's behind this? Why should I not? Why should I? There's an answer to that. Why, as I say again, is as big as God himself.

You may take it if he calls the reason is as big as himself. And you will never get to the end.

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