

BFFs FOREVER

Studies in the Life of Abraham

Text

Genesis 21:22-34

Topic

Even in the mundane routine of day-to-day living
God was revealing Himself *to* and *through* Abraham

Title

"It's a Spiritual Life"

Introduction

It's a Wonderful Life is usually chosen as the all-time favorite Christmas movie in America. It chronicles the life of George Bailey who at first he doesn't know that his life is wonderful. In fact, try as he might, he can never escape the mundane.

On the night of his honeymoon, for example, his dreams are squelched as he must use his own money meant for his honeymoon to save the building and loan business.

In the end he is made to see that his life was used to help people. He is shown by an angel that the effects of his everyday decisions starting in childhood reverberate with significance throughout the world. Once he sees what he has accomplished in the midst of such a mundane existence, there is joy and a new passion for life.

In our text we find Abraham in a rather lengthy period of his life. From the weaning of Isaac early in the chapter until he is called upon to sacrifice Isaac in the next chapter is a period of at least ten years and probably more like thirty years.

In those thirty years Abraham signed a contract with Abimelech regarding water rights. Not too exciting. O, and he planted a single tamarisk tree.

I want to show, however, that there was nothing mundane about these years. Or maybe it would be better to say that in those seemingly mundane years God was still powerfully at work both *in* and *through* Abraham.

Our lives can seem mundane - especially compared to the Bible characters we read about. I mean, when was the last time you were thrown into a fiery furnace? Or into a lions den?

Your day-to-day life may seem mundane but if you are a believer **it is not**. Like with Abraham, Jesus is working *in* you and *through* you.

I'll organize my thoughts around two questions: #1 Day-by-Day, Are You Revealing A Dependence Upon Jesus?, and #2 Day-by-Day, Are You Receiving A Discovery From Jesus?

#1 Day-by-Day,
Are You Revealing A Dependence Upon Jesus?
(v22-32)

Devotional writer W.H. Griffith Thomas said this:

The ordinary uneventful days of a believer's life are usually a better test of his true character than an emergency or crisis. It is sometimes possible to face a great occasion with wisdom and courage, and yet to fail in some simple, average experiences of daily living.

For the most part we live in the "simple, average experiences of daily living." We get up; we go to work; we come home; we go to bed; we do it all over again.

Do we believe that God can just as powerfully be revealed in the mundane as He can in the miracle?

For thirty years Abraham went to work each day and did things like dig wells and sign treaties. He came home each day and gardened - watering and tending his tamarisk tree.

Genesis 21:22 And it came to pass at that time that Abimelech and Phichol, the commander of his army, spoke to Abraham, saying, "God is with you in all that you do.

Both "Abimelech" and "Phichol" are titles, they are roles, not proper names.

Observing Abraham's day-to-day life they concluded, "God is with you in all that you do." Really? What was he doing? Not much!

It wasn't what Abraham was doing, it was how he was doing it.

Abimelech's comments remind me of the great statement made by the apostle Paul in Galatians 2:20,

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

The understanding I get from the Bible is that Jesus is such a part of my life, He is so present in my life, that I automatically do **everything** as if He really were "with me," since spiritually speaking, *He is*.

I shouldn't need to tell you that we all fall short revealing God in all that we do. Mostly it's because we still struggle with the flesh - that influence and inclination to sin that remains in my unredeemed physical body.

What did Abimelech and Phichol see in Abraham's day-to-day living? In the ensuing discussion between the three of them it is revealed that Abraham was patient in suffering wrong against himself. Abimelech wanted to enter into an agreement with Abraham, but his people had defrauded Abraham. Abraham, for his part, bore it with patience.

Genesis 21:23 Now therefore, swear to me by God that you will not deal falsely with me, with my offspring, or with my posterity; but that according to the kindness that I have done to you, you will do to me and to the land in which you have dwelt."

Genesis 21:24 And Abraham said, "I will swear."

It might sound like Abimelech was worried Abraham was not trustworthy but this is just standard language. It's like the stuff in contracts you sign that make you sound like a criminal. We call it legalese. "The party of the first part..." "Everything excluded is deemed included..." Stuff like that.

Genesis 21:25 Then Abraham rebuked Abimelech because of a well of water which Abimelech's servants had seized.

Genesis 21:26 And Abimelech said, "I do not know who has done this thing; you did not tell me, nor had I heard of it until today."

Please note that Abraham agreed to this contract, he swore to it, *before* resolving the issue of the well. He didn't immediately demand what he believed to be his rights.

Just because you are a Christian it doesn't mean you must give up all your rights. It doesn't mean you can never complain or file a grievance.

But generally speaking, we are far too quick in demanding our rights. Obviously we need the Lord to lead us in individual matters. My only point is that we rarely think He will lead us to be defrauded or taken advantage of - **even though He was when He walked the earth on His way to the Cross.**

Genesis 21:27 So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two of them made a covenant.

Genesis 21:28 And Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves.

Genesis 21:29 Then Abimelech asked Abraham, "What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs which you have set by themselves?"

Genesis 21:30 And he said, "You will take these seven ewe lambs from my hand, that they may be my witness that I have dug this well."

Genesis 21:31 Therefore he called that place Beersheba, because the two of them swore an oath there.

I'm not up to speed on ancient water rights but it seems to me that Abraham was exceedingly generous towards Abimelech. Abraham had dug a well - no easy task in those days with their primitive tools! Abimelech's men had seized it. Now he had dug another well. You'd think Abimelech owed him, not the other way around. Yet Abraham gives Abimelech seven ewe lambs as a token and a payment for it.

Not only had he met his being defrauded with longsuffering, Abraham gives generously to those who had defrauded him!

You see now why the only conclusion a person could come to when looking at Abraham was “God is with you in everything that you do.” He didn’t just talk about Jesus, or do a few religious things. No, he acted just like Jesus, or just as if the Lord was really there with him.

The most mundane, routine life ever lived may have been that of Jesus for His first thirty or so years on the earth. There’s a lot of excitement at His birth, then an episode when He was twelve; but the rest of it is Him hanging-out in an obscure village learning the common trade of carpentry.

Thus it is amazing when, at His baptism, God the Father speaks from Heaven to declare, “this is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). It wasn’t what Jesus had done, but how He had done it. God was with Him in everything He did, day-by-day.

You know what? You and I are now God’s beloved sons and daughters by virtue of being in Christ. Our obscure, mundane, humdrum lives are exciting to Him. They give Him opportunity to declare He is well pleased.

#2 Day-by-Day,
Are You Receiving A Discovery From Jesus?
(v33-34)

The chapter closes with a picture of Abraham enjoying his tamarisk tree.

Genesis 21:33 Then Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there called on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God.

The word for “tree” has been translated in some versions as *grove*. Most likely it was a single tree meant to commemorate this experience.

More than just a memorial, it was where Abraham “called on the name of the Lord.” It was a place of worship, of prayer. It was Abraham’s closet, as it were, where he met with the Lord.

We call this time and place devotions. Someone once said, "The Gospel brings man to God; devotions keep him close to God." In James 4:8 we read, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you."

I don't want to say anything that would minimize the importance of daily devotions, but I feel I must mention that they are not to be observed simply out of habit or as a sort of religious duty. If I miss my morning or evening devotions, God is not mad at me.

Here is how to understand devotions. If you've ever been in love, you know the feeling of wanting to be with the person you are in love with. You want to talk with her, walk with her, hang out with her. Day-to-day living interferes with your desire to be together, but you are always thinking about her. It's as if she is with you the whole day even though you are apart and longing to be together.

How much more should we feel this way about the Lord! There should be a passion associated with Him that far exceeds our other relationships.

Jesus expressed this kind of passion when He talked to us about our relationship to Him. Writing to the saints He loved at Ephesus, He noted that they were doing everything Christians ought to be doing but that they were negligent in the most important thing. Jesus said to them, "you have left your first love."

Whether you have fallen short in your devotions for 2011 or are on track to finish strong, check your heart for "first love." It's the love of engagement, the romantic love, between a Bridegroom and a bride.

On a human level we use the expression, "the honeymoon is over." One writer said, "the honeymoon can last five days or five years, but at some point the heat and the hormones subside."

Here's the thing. **We haven't even had our honeymoon yet when it comes to our relationship with Jesus!** We are still in the engagement period when love ought to remain white-hot.

While Abraham was under his tamarisk tree Jesus revealed to him that He was “the Everlasting God.” We should pause when we read that. It was a brand new name for Himself that Jesus was giving Abraham.

In the context of the kind of love-relationship we are describing, think of this as a sort of pet-name for Jesus that Abraham was given. A nickname that was intimate and endearing.

“Everlasting God” is a translation of *El Olam*. Those are what the words mean. What they reveal goes far deeper.

One Jewish writer said this about *El Olam*:

This name of God teaches us that God has no beginning, no end and stands outside of and beyond time. God's nature and purposes are timeless, for God created time and is not limited by time in any way. Before there was a universe and before there was time, God existed, without beginning and without end (Psalm 90:2).

The term *Olam* also includes the unchangeableness of God. Everything we know changes, in some way, over time; but God never changes. His character, His Word, His promises, His purposes and His kingdom never change and never end. For us, this means that God is constant, dependable, reliable and faithful!

Think about the episode with Abimelech and Phichol. Abraham was going about his day-to-day business. He was digging wells, tending his flocks and herds. There were problems - like the time one of his wells was seized. There were meetings and negotiations.

Behind it all and above it all God had His timeless purposes. It was all working together for Abraham's good. No matter what happened day-by-day, the Lord never changed. In fact, the conflicts and conversations Abraham were involved with only served to magnify God as eternal.

The same is true of us in our mundane day-by-day lives. Our experiences can, if we let them, highlight aspects of the love and nature of God. In fact, God designs our lives so that the episodes will reveal something of Him - if we are looking to receive it from Him.

Genesis 21:34 And Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines many days.

This chapter marks the first mention of “the Philistines” in the Bible. The origin and background of the Philistines had not been completely proven. Ancient Egyptian records include them as part of a larger movement of people known as the Sea Peoples who invaded Egypt about 1188BC by land and by sea, battling the forces of Ramses III, who, according to Egyptian records, defeated them. These Sea Peoples originated in the Aegean area.

The Philistines were not Arabs nor even Semites. They were most closely related to the Greeks originating from Asia Minor and Greek localities, like Crete. They did not speak Arabic. They had no connection, ethnic, linguistic or historical with Arabia or Arabs.

Besides the historic significance of including them in this narrative, we are being reminded that the world in which we walk with our Lord is a weird place. It's a dangerous place. The Philistines would become the perpetual enemies of Abraham's descendants. They were marauders and raiders that never gave Israel a moment's rest.

You really shouldn't get too comfortable in the world. It's not your home. You are just passing through.

Whether you love to travel or not, most people tire of living out of suitcases. They long to get home where they can feel 'at home.'

Do you have a sense you are living out of suitcases - longing for home? Or are you looking to add more-and-more suitcases in an attempt to have this world's goods?

You should have a sense that you're getting ready for your honeymoon. *Pack light!* Just like the airlines have size and weight restrictions, you ought to keep your packing for Heaven to a minimum.

Instead of filling your house, fill your heart with revelations from Jesus about His love for you.

It's a spiritual life you want.