

III. ABRAHAM, THE MAN OF PRAYER

Oh for determined men and women, who will rise early and really burn out for God. Oh for a faith that will sweep into heaven with the early dawning of the morning and have ships from a shoreless sea loaded in the soul's harbor ere the ordinary laborer has knocked the dew from his scythe or the huckster has turned from his pallet of straw to spread nature's treasures of fruit before the early buyers.--Rev. Homer W. Hodge.

Abraham, the friend of God, was a striking illustration of one of the Old Testament saints who believed strongly in prayer. Abraham was not a shadowy figure by any means. In the simplicity and dimness of the patriarchal dispensation, as illustrated by him, we learn the worth of prayer, as well as discover its antiquity. The fact is, prayer reaches back to the first ages of man on earth. We see how the energy of prayer is absolutely required in the simplest as well as in the most complex dispensations of God's grace. When we study Abraham's character, we find that after his call to go out into an unknown country, on his journey with his family and his household servants, wherever he tarried by the way for the night or longer, he always erected an altar, and "called upon the name of the Lord." And this man of faith and prayer was one of the first to erect a family altar, around which to gather his household and offer the sacrifices of worship, of praise and of prayer. These altars built by Abraham were, first of all, essentially altars about which he gathered his household, as distinguished from secret prayer.

As God's revelations became fuller and more perfect, Abraham's prayerfulness increased, and it was at one of these spiritual eras that "Abraham fell on his face and God talked with him." On still another occasion we find this man, "the father of the faithful," on his face before God, astonished almost to incredulity at the purposes and revelations of Almighty God to him in promising him a son in his old age, and the wonderful engagements which God made concerning his promised son.

Even Ishmael's destiny is shaped by Abraham's prayer when he prayed, "O that Ishmael might live before thee!"

What a remarkable story is that of Abraham's standing before God repeating his intercessions for the wicked city of Sodom, the home of his nephew Lot, doomed by God's decision to destroy it! Sodom's fate was for a while stayed by Abraham's praying, and was almost entirely relieved by the humility and insistence of the praying of this man who believed strongly in prayer and who knew how to pray. No other recourse was opened to Abraham to save Sodom but prayer. Perhaps the failure to ultimately rescue Sodom from her doom of destruction was due to Abraham's optimistic view of the spiritual condition of things in that city. It might have been possible,--who knows?--that if Abraham had entreated God once more, and asked Him to spare the city if even one righteous man was found there, for Lot's sake, He might have heeded Abraham's request.

Note another instance in the life of Abraham as showing how he was a man of prayer and had power with God. Abraham had journeyed to and was sojourning in Gerar. Fearing that Abimelech might kill him and appropriate Sarah his wife to his own lustful uses, he deceived Abimelech by claiming that Sarah was his sister. God appeared unto

Abimelech in a dream and warned him not to touch Sarah, telling him that she was the wife of Abraham, and not his sister. Then he said unto Abimelech, "Now restore therefore the man his wife; for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live." And the conclusion of the incident is thus recorded: "So Abraham prayed unto God, and God healed Abimelech and his wife, and his maid servants, and they bare children. For the Lord had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, his wife."

This was a case somewhat on the line of that of Job at the close of his fearful experience and his terrible trials, when his friends, not understanding Job, neither comprehending God's dealings with this servant of His, falsely charged Job with being in sin as the cause of all his troubles. God said to these friends of Job, "My servant Job shall pray for you, for him will I accept. And the Lord turned the captivity of Job when he had prayed for his friends."

Almighty God knew His servant Job as a man of prayer, and He could afford to send these friends of Job to him to pray in order to carry out and fulfill His plans and purposes.

It was Abraham's rule to stand before the Lord in prayer. His life was surcharged with prayer and Abraham's dispensation was sanctified by prayer. For wherever he halted in his pilgrimage, prayer was his inseparable accompaniment. Side by side with the altar of sacrifice was the altar of prayer. He got up early in the morning to the place where he stood before the Lord in prayer.