

First Things – Genesis

Genesis 14

“Sergeant Abram”

1. ABRAM’S MISSION

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1. One of America’s greatest soldiers and heroes was Sergeant Alvin C. York. He was born in a two-room log cabin near Pall Mall, TN in 1887.

2. York originally considered himself a conscientious objector, and wrestled with the notion of fighting in the war because of his faith.

3. While on leave at home, York became convinced that it was God’s will for him to fight, and he went into World War I believing that God would protect him and use him in the conflict.

4. By the end of the war, York was highly decorated. Most notably, he was awarded the Medal of Honor for leading an attack on a German machine gun nest, where he took 32 machine guns, killed 28 Germans, and captured 132 others.

5. In many ways, Alvin York was an unlikely soldier. The same could be said for Abram in the text before us in Genesis 14.

6. When his nephew Lot was captured in the fall out of a war between rival kingdoms, Abram was compelled to go and fight in order to rescue his relative.

7. One old writer said of Abram, “From a herd he becomes a hero.”ⁱ Up until this chapter, Abram had simply been a sojourner, moving from place to place, following the call of God.

8. In chapter 14, Abram moves from sojourner to soldier, and he reminds us of a truth regarding our lives as followers of Jesus Christ.

9. That is; the Christian life is not a playground; it is a battleground. We are called to put on the armor of God, to fight the good fight of faith, and to live as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

10. As we look over this battle scene from the life of Abram, there are several truths that speak to us about our own service to the Lord, and point us ultimately to the Captain of our salvation, Jesus Christ.

11. Look with me at this text, and notice first of all:

I. ABRAM'S MISSION

1. In the previous chapter, Abram had been gracious and selfless, refusing to fight with Lot over the land.

2. Though Abram was a meek man, he was by no means a weak man, and that becomes clear when in chapter 14, he musters his men and sets out on a military mission.

3. Though we as believers are not to be combative and contentious, always looking for a fight, we are nonetheless called to a spiritual mission, and there is an ongoing warfare in which we are to participate.

4. In II Corinthians 10:3, the Apostle Paul says that, "...we do not war after the flesh." In other words, our mission is not a physical one, but it is nonetheless a real one.

5. I think we are pointed to some things regarding our mission from the mission of Abram in this text. Notice first of all:

A. The reason for this mission

1. In verse 14, we read, "*And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan.*"

2. Lot had chosen to move to the city of Sodom, and when it fell to a conquering army, he was taken captive and carried away.

3. Rather than leaving Lot to lie in the bed he had made for himself, Abram set out to rescue his spiritual brother from the hands of the enemy.

4. Part of our mission as believers is to go into enemy territory where men and women are held captive by sin, and seek by the help of God to rescue them from the enemy.

5. When God saves us, it is not His intention that we just relax in our safety and security. No, He has called us to go after those who are held in sin and rescue them by the power of the gospel.

6. In 1869, the blind hymn writer, Fanny Crosby summed up this aspect of the Christian's mission when she wrote:

*Rescue the perishing, care for the dying,
Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave,
Weep o'er the erring one, lift up the fallen,*

Tell them of Jesus, the mighty to save!

7. At the close of his letter, Bro. James gives us encouragement for this mission. He says, *“Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.”*

8. Whether it is a Christian brother and sister who have fallen into the hands of the enemy or the multitudes of the lost around us, we have a mission to rescue the perishing.

9. As we look further at Abram’s mission, consider not only the reason for this mission, but consider also:

B. The result of this mission

1. Verse 14 says that Abram assembled his army of 318 men, and along with some help from his neighbors, he began to pursue those who had captured Lot.

2. Verse 15 says, *“And he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus.”*

3. Using the cover of darkness and a keen strategy of attack, Abram and his band of commandos overtook and conquered the enemy.

4. R. Kent Hughes says, *“Deadly arrows flew in the night, and bloody swords were raised gleaming in the dusty moonlight – and the four kings were put to flight.”*ⁱⁱ

5. He goes on to say that though he was only a pilgrim with a small army, *“Abram could be formidable. It was not wise to fool with Father Abram.”*ⁱⁱⁱ

6. In much the same way, though we as Christians are outnumbered in this sinful world, and though the “weapons of our warfare” are not the kind this world uses, nonetheless we are more than conquerors through Him that loves us!

7. When we serve the Lord in the power of His might, and we seek by faith to carry out the mission He has given us, we have been promised the victory.

8. Though our evil enemy rages, and seems to claim more territory with every passing day, we fight on, believing what Paul said in Romans 8:31, *“...If God be for us, who can be against us?”*

9. We battle every day, claiming the promise of Isaiah 54:17: *“No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD.”*

10. Abram's mission in this text challenges us to sing again, "Onward Christian Soldiers", and to fulfill the mission Jesus has given to us as His people.

11. As we look further that this chapter, we see not only *Abram's mission*, but we see also secondly:

II. ABRAM'S MEETING

1. This first part of this chapter includes the names of a number of kings who ruled during that time, and who were involved this war.

2. In this chapter, Abram is surrounded by kings, and yet it is one king in particular that Abram meets that really draws our attention and interest.

3. One old commentator said, "Abram bows only to Melchizedek, in a story filled with kings."^{iv}

4. This meeting with the man called Melchizedek is of particular interest to us as Christians. Consider this meeting with me. Notice firstly:

A. Who we recognize in this meeting

1. The name Melchizedek appears in only three places in Scripture; here in Genesis 14, in Psalm 110, and in Hebrews chapter 7.

2. Even with those three passages, there is something mysterious about him. John Calvin says, "...he is presented to us...as if he had dropped from the clouds..."^v

3. In spite of the mystery surrounding Melchizedek, Hebrews 7:3 *does* tell us that he was, "...made like unto the Son of God..." The *ESV* translates that as, "resembling the Son of God."

4. In other words, Melchizedek is a type and picture of our Lord Jesus. That becomes clear as you look at what is said of him in this chapter.

5. For instance, his name, Melchizedek, literally means, "King of righteousness". He is also said to be the "king of Salem". Salem means peace.

6. So this Melchizedek is the King of righteousness and peace. We are reminded by him that in the King of kings, Jesus Christ, righteousness and peace have kissed, and are blended together perfectly in His rule.

7. Verse 18 says of Melchizedek: "...he was the priest of the most high God." Once again, we recognize Jesus, who is our Great High Priest, ever living to make intercession for us.

8. Hebrews 7:3 describes Melchizedek as being, “*Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life...*”

9. When we read this, we are reminded that though Jesus was born into this world at Bethlehem that was not His beginning.

10. He is the Ancient of Days, with God in eternity past and forever alive into the endless ages to come. He is older than his birthday and lives beyond the day of his death.

11. In this text, his name-tag reads, “Melchizedek”, but he sure looks a lot like Jesus. We recognize our Savior in the description of this priest-king of Salem.

12. Consider not only who we recognize in this meeting, but consider also further:

B. What we realize from this meeting

1. Understanding that this Melchizedek is clearly a type and picture of our Lord Jesus, what occurs between him and Abram, the Father of the Faithful, is of great interest to us.

2. We can learn something about our relationship to Jesus by studying this meeting between Abram and Melchizedek. For instance, we realize here *what we receive from Christ*.

3. Look at verses 19 and 20. When Melchizedek met Abram, the Bible says, “*...he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand...*”

4. In other words, Melchizedek blessed Abram on behalf of God, and then he blessed God on behalf of Abram. Is that not what Christ does for us?

5. He is the one and only Mediator between God and man, and when we meet Him by faith, He bestows on us all the blessings of God, and He is the only way that we can ever bless God in return.

6. All we ever see of God is through the blessing of Jesus. All God ever sees of us is through the blood of Jesus.

7. So we realize here what we receive from Christ, but we also realize through this meeting *what we render to Christ*.

8. The end of verse 20 says that Abram gave to Melchizedek tithes, or literally a tenth, of everything he had gotten in the battle.

9. On a very practical level, we realize that the reason we tithe and give our money to the Lord is because of who He is, and because we recognize His authority over us.

10. To not tithe, and give *at least* a tenth of your income, is to rob God of what is rightfully His. It is not only disobedient, it is disrespectful.

11. The larger lesson here, however, is that when we meet Jesus, our King and Priest, we must acknowledge who He is and submit to His Lordship over our lives!

12. Abram comes back into town the hero, and a great man even in the midst of kings. Yet, when Abram meets Melchizedek, he recognizes one superior to him, and he responds accordingly.

13. With that in mind, when we meet Jesus, our response should be:

*Jesus, Jesus, Lord to me,
Master, Savior, Prince of Peace,
Ruler of my heart today,
Jesus, Lord to me!*

14. There is a final truth we find as we look at this chapter. We see here not only *Abram's mission*, and *Abram's meeting*, but notice lastly:

III. ABRAM'S MINDSET

1. As Abram returned from his victory, the Bible says that he not only met Melchizedek, King of Salem, but he also was met by the King of Sodom.

2. This meeting was very different from the one with Melchizedek, and in this meeting Abram displays a mindset that speaks to us of how we should respond to the things of this world.

3. In II Timothy 2:4, Paul gave the young preacher this instruction. He said, "*No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.*"

4. Long before Paul wrote those words, Abram embodied them in his conversation with the king of Sodom. Notice Abram's mindset here. First of all, notice:

A. What was suggested to Abram

1. Look at verse 21. It says, "*And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself.*"

2. In other words, the king told Abram to give him back his people, but that he could keep the spoils that he had recovered.

3. This was an offer to take advantage of some of the goods of Sodom. It was an opportunity to enjoy some of things that Lot had been enjoying.
4. All around us today there are offers from this world and opportunities to partake of its goods and its pleasures.
5. We live in a society of consumption. Everything imaginable is available for those who can afford it and are willing to take it.
6. Not all of it is bad, and there are certainly things that we can enjoy while we live in this world.
7. Yet, the things of this world are dangerous for those of us who are supposed to be living for the world that is to come; laying up treasure in heaven, rather than living it up down here.
8. In the classic book, *Pilgrim's Progress*, the two main characters enter a place called "Vanity Fair". It is essentially a marketplace, where the author says that everything that is sold there is pure vanity.
9. As Christian and his friend walk through the market, the sellers call out to them and try to show them their foolish merchandise, but it says that the boys just plugged their ears and looked toward heaven.
10. We live in a "Vanity Fair" world, where every kind of amusement and enjoyment are offered to us on a daily basis.
11. With that in mind, look back at our text and Abram's mindset. Notice not only what was suggested to Abram, but notice further:

B. What was rejected by Abram

1. The king of Sodom told Abram to take all the goods. Abram's response is found in verses 22 and 23.
2. He said, *"...I have lift up mine hand unto the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, That I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich."*
3. Abram rejected the offer of the kind of Sodom. He had made a vow to the Lord that he would not take anything from the world of Sodom.
4. In other words, Abram said, "I don't want or need anything you've got, because I don't want you to ever think you have any kind of hold on me."

5. What a great mentality and mindset this is for us to adopt as we walk through this vain world with all its temptations and attractions!

6. We ought to lift our hands to heaven, and turn our face from the world saying, "This world has nothing to offer me! What I have in it and what I need in it God alone will give me!"

7. Rather than letting ourselves become addicted and indebted to the things of this life and this world, we ought to set our minds on things above, and live for the eternal God who promises us more than this world can ever offer us.

8. Charles Swindoll shares a little poem called "The Yuppie's Prayer" Let me give you a line or two from it:

"Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray my Cuisinart to keep,
I pray my stocks are on the rise,
And that my analyst is wise...

I pray my [cellular] phone still works,
That my career won't lose its perks...

I pray my health club doesn't close,
And that my money market grows,
If I go broke before I wake,
I pray my Volvo they won't take."^{vi}

9. If we succumb to the offers of this world, we will certainly find ourselves concerned for those things, rather than committed to the things that really matter.

10. May God give us the mindset of Abram, and help us to say to this world, "I have lifted my hand to Christ, and I don't need anything you are offering."

1. Underlying all of Abram's conduct in this chapter is his faith in God. As with most of Abram's story, his going out to battle and his return from it were acts of faith.

2. Abram believed God to help him in the fight and to reward him with the blessings He had promised.

3. Sergeant Abram reminds us in this chapter of a truth we find stated in I John 5:4. "*For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.*"

4. Whether we are seeking to rescue captive sinners or resisting the vain offers of this world, our victory as Christian soldiers comes through faith.

5. And that faith must always be directed towards our King and Priest, the Lord Jesus. As we meet with Him every day, we receive His blessings, and we are enabled to fight the good fight of faith.

ⁱ Dods, Marcus, The Book of Genesis, (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1899), p. 125

ⁱⁱ Hughes, R. Kent, Genesis: Beginning and Blessing, (Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL, 2004), p. 214

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid

^{iv} Von Rad, Gerhard, Genesis: A Commentary, (Westminster, Philadelphia, 1972), p. 181

^v Calvin, John, "John Calvin's Bible Commentary: Genesis 14", www.ewordtoday.com, accessed 4/14/11, <http://www.ewordtoday.com/comments/genesis/calvin/genesis14.htm>

^{vi} Swindoll, Charles, The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart, (Word Publishers, Nashville, 1998), p. 609-610