

First Things – Genesis

Genesis 21:22-34

“What In The World Are You Doing?”

I. WHAT IS YOUR IMPRESSION ON THIS WORLD?

A. Is your walk visible to this world?

B. Is your word credible to this world?

II. WHAT IS YOUR INTERACTION WITH THIS WORLD?

A. When you must be guarded

B. When you must be gracious

III. WHAT IS YOUR INTEREST IN THIS WORLD?

A. Leave something that can survive you

B. Love someone that will save you

1. As a kid growing up in church, in my mind Abraham was little more than a flannel graph figure used in the stories they taught me in children’s church.
2. I thought of him as just another bearded Bible man wearing what appeared to me to be an elaborate bath robe. I don’t think it occurred to me that he was a *real* man living in the *real* world.
3. The truth is, however, Abraham is more than a Bible character. He was a historical person, who lived his life in this *real* world somewhere around the 17th century B.C.
4. At the close of Genesis 21, an eventful chapter to say the least, we find a story that serves to remind us of Abraham’s real life in the real world.
5. Though Abraham was following the God of heaven, he still lived among the people of this world. Though Abraham was looking for a better country, he was living in an earthly country.
6. This account of Abraham’s dealings with King Abimelech serves to remind us of a truth regarding our lives as followers of Jesus today.
7. While we are citizens of the Kingdom of Christ, we are also still residents of this present world. We live with a constant tension of being *in* this world, but not really *of* this world.
8. This text points us to the intersection of our spiritual lives and our practical lives. It teaches us how we are to live in this world while relating to those who do not know the Lord.
9. In Colossians 4:5, Paul urges us to, “*Walk in wisdom toward them that are without...*” He is referring to those who are “without” the Lord.

10. With that in mind, I want us to examine this text, and I want to challenge you about what you are doing as a Christian while you live and move in this non-Christian world.

11. There are three questions I want to pose to you that I draw from this episode in Abraham's life. The first one is this:

I. WHAT IS YOUR IMPRESSION ON THIS WORLD?

1. A writer by the name of Leslie B. Flynn said, "No person can enter the stream of history without either increasing or decreasing the sum total of human happiness. No one can be an isolationist."ⁱ

2. Like or not, every one of us leaves some kind of impression on the world in which we live. It may be good, bad, or a little of both, but we all leave a mark on the people around us.

3. In our text, the pagan King Abimelech reveals something of the impression Abraham had made on the people around him.

4. Notice with me what he said to Abraham, and consider the impression you are making on the world around you. First of all, ask yourself this:

A. Is your walk visible to this world?

1. Look in our text at verse 22. It says, "*And it came to pass at that time, that Abimelech and Phichol the chief captain of his host spake unto Abraham, saying, God is with thee in all that thou doest.*"

2. King Abimelech, along with his top military general came to visit Abraham the Hebrew. His first words to Abraham indicated that he recognized something spiritual, something sanctified about Abraham's life.

3. Though Abimelech was certainly not a follower of Jehovah, the God of Abraham, he still recognized that Abraham's God was with him in everything he did.

4. It is easy here at church to be identified with your God. Here we gather to show our connection to Christ by worshipping and seeking Him.

5. I wonder, however, what about the people outside this church (your neighbors, co-workers, classmates, acquaintances); do they know anything about the presence of Jesus in your life?

6. Is your walk with the Lord visible to those who live and work around you? They may not know the Lord Jesus, but they do know that *you* do?

7. In Matthew 5:16, Jesus said, *“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”*

8. Jesus doesn't need any incognito followers. He has no use for secret saints, who disguise their discipleship in front of a watching world.

*We are the only Bible a careless world will read;
We are the sinner's gospel; we are the scoffer's creed;
We are the Lord's last message, given in deed and word;
[But] What if the type is crooked; what if the print is blurred?ⁱⁱ*

9. Is the impression you leave on this lost world that of someone in whom dwells the Spirit of God? Ask yourselves not only whether your walk is visible to this world, but ask yourself also:

B. Is your word credible to this world?

1. Look now at verse 23, and notice what else Abimelech said to Abraham. He asked, *“Now therefore swear unto me here by God that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son: but according to the kindness that I have done unto thee, thou shalt do unto me, and to the land wherein thou hast sojourned.”*

2. If Abraham was such a godly man, why would Abimelech need him to swear to God that he would be fair and honest in his dealings?

3. I think the answer goes back to the previous chapter. There, when Abraham and Abimelech first met, Abraham was *not* completely honest with the king.

4. You'll recall that Abraham once again lied about the nature of his relationship to Sarah, telling Abimelech that she was his sister, leaving out the fact that she was his wife.

5. When Abimelech found out about it, he said to Abraham, *“Why did you do this to me!?”* Now, even though Abimelech knows that Abraham has a relationship with God, he is still a bit skeptical of Abraham's word.

6. What a warning this ought to be to us as followers of Christ in this world! We should give no one any reason to question our integrity!

7. People in this world may not believe *what* we believe, but they ought to be able to believe those of us who believe. If anybody should be a people of integrity, it ought to be those of us who are followers of Him who is the Truth!

8. The environmental movement has coined the phrase “carbon footprint”. It is a way of describing the environmental impact of your lifestyle.

9. Much more important than your carbon footprint is your Christian footprint. What kind of impression are you leaving on the world around you?

10. Consider a second question we draw from this scene in Abraham’s life. Consider not only the question of *what is your impression on this world?* Ask yourself also this:

II. WHAT IS YOUR INTERACTION WITH THIS WORLD?

1. Much of the Biblical story of Abraham deals with his interactions with God. James calls Abraham “the friend of God”, and that relationship is primarily what the Scripture records.

2. However, in our text at the close of chapter 21, we find Abraham interacting with a pagan king. He was a friend of God, but he also had relationships with the people around him.

3. How the patriarch handled himself with Abimelech in this passage is a good example of how we ought to interact with the people of our world as well.

4. Notice in this text that Abraham points us to a couple of principles to remember when relating to the people of this world. First of all, Abraham reminds us of:

A. When you must be guarded

1. Abimelech came to Abraham wanting to form a sort of peace treaty. He said, *“...according to the kindness that I have done unto thee, thou shalt do unto me, and to the land wherein thou hast sojourned.”*

2. Abraham was willing to agree to these terms, but before he did, he brought up a particular issue he had with the king.

3. Notice verse 25. It says, *“And Abraham reproveth Abimelech because of a well of water, which Abimelech’s servants had violently taken away.”*

4. Apparently, one of the wells that Abraham had dug had been seized by some of Abimelech’s men. Abraham wanted to settle the matter of that well before he went any further with the king.

5. Abraham needed that well for his own existence, and he was not willing to give up his well just for the sake of friendship with Abimelech.

6. There are some things that we must defend and guard while we travel through this world. Though we don't want to be contentious, we must not compromise the things that are essential to our spiritual lives.

7. In John 4:14, Jesus said, *"But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."*

8. If we are not careful, the well of water that Jesus has given to us will be threatened by the things of this world.

9. The cares and pleasures of this life and the pressures of the world around us will try to take from us the well of our relationship with Jesus.

10. Therefore our interactions with the world must always be guarded and careful, conditioned on the fact that we don't give up what Jesus has given to us in order to get along with the society around us.

11. Don't give up your well in order to get along with the world! If fitting in means selling out, then its better be an outcast with a well, than a parched player in a thirsty world.

12. As Abraham interacted with Abimelech, he shows us not only when you must guarded, but also further, he demonstrates for us:

B. When you must be gracious

1. Abraham brought up the matter of the stolen well, and Abimelech said in verse 26, "I didn't know anything about that stolen well. This is the first of I've heard of it."

2. He apparently agreed to return the well to Abraham, and with that issue settled, verse 27 says, *"And Abraham took sheep and oxen, and gave them unto Abimelech; and both of them made a covenant."*

3. Along with the other sheep and oxen, the text says that Abraham added seven other lambs that he gave to Abimelech as a guarantee of his ownership of the well he had dug.

4. What I want you to notice here is that though Abimelech is the one who had approached Abraham, Abraham is the one who provides the animals and gifts of this covenant agreement.

5. In other words, Abraham was gracious and kind in his dealings with Abimelech. He was willing to do all he could to keep peace with his neighbors.

6. As I studied this text, I thought of what Paul said in Romans 12:18. That verse says, *“If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.”*

7. Unfortunately, I’ve met Christians who can’t get along with anybody! They constantly seem to be at odds with people, and actually seem to enjoy the conflict.

8. Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers...,” and His people are supposed to be the ones who turn the other cheek, not land the next blow.

9. Recently I read a book about a famous pastor named J. Frank Norris. The book is called “The Shooting Salvationist”, and tells the story of Norris’ trial for murder in 1926, after shooting a man in his office at the First Baptist Church of Fort Worth.

10. Before the shooting, people’s opinion of Norris was varied. The writer says, “One faction says ‘he totes a gun,’ the other says ‘he totes two guns’.”ⁱⁱⁱ

11. Sadly, too many Christians are ready to pull out their guns and fight before they try to live graciously and peacefully with the people around them.

12. Abraham reminds us that in our interactions with the world, while we must have a backbone, it is to be located behind a heart of grace, peace, and love.

13. Consider one more question we draw from Abraham’s conduct in this text. Ask yourself not only *what is your impression on this world*, and *what is your interaction with this world*, but consider also this:

III. WHAT IS YOUR INTEREST IN THIS WORLD?

1. Having met with a king, what then did Abraham do? Why, he did what he had been doing before the king came to see him.

2. In other words, his interest and intentions in this world were not deterred or distracted by his interaction with Abimelech.

3. Look at verse 33. It says, *“And Abraham planted a grove in Beersheba, and called there on the name of the LORD, the everlasting God.”*

4. Just as he had before in the other places he had dwelt, Abraham just continued to live out his life on earth while looking to the God of heaven.

5. In this simple verse I think we are pointed to a powerful truth about our lives in this world.

6. You see; we always have to find the balance between living in this present world, even while we are looking for a world that is to come. I think Abraham demonstrates that interest for us.

7. Consider what we learn here from Abraham. First of all, he reminds us of the need to:

A. Leave something that will survive you

1. Look again at verse 33. It says, “*And Abraham planted a grove in Beersheba...*” The language seems to indicate that it was a specific type of tree that Abraham planted. It was a Tamarisk tree.

2. The Tamarisk was a long-living tree, with hard wood and evergreen leaves. Abraham planted it in the place where he had made a treaty with Abimelech.

3. By this time, Abraham is well up in years, as we know, and in planting this tree, he left something behind that would survive him long after he was gone.

4. In fact, later on in this book, after Abraham had already died and gone to heaven, we read of his son Isaac dwelling at Beersheba, the very place where this grove was planted.

5. What I want you to see is that while Abraham was living in this world, he left something here that would outlive him and be useful to the generations that would follow him.

6. In much the same way, as you and I make our pilgrimage through this world, heading for the world that is to come, it ought to be in our hearts to leave something in this world that will outlast and surpass our short lives here.

7. What of your life now will live on after you’ve died? What will you plant now that will make a difference in the life of the generations that follow you?

8. In Randolph County, North Carolina, I’ve visited the grave of Shubal Stearns. In 1755, Stearns and 16 members of his extended family settled in a rural area of North Carolina and started the Sandy Creek Baptist Church.

9. Within two years, the membership of the church swelled to over 600 people. Stearns’ brother in law was Daniel Marshall. Marshall eventually moved from North Carolina down into what would become Georgia.

10. There he started the first baptist church in this state, and today, we worship in the shadow of what a little-known preacher in central North Carolina planted over 250 years ago.

11. You see; it's not what you have in this life, but what you leave behind that ought to concern those of us who serve the Lord.

12. Our interest in this world ought to be to leave something that can survive you. Furthermore, Abraham reminds us that while in this world our interest ought to be to:

B. Love someone that can save you

1. Again, verse 33 says, *"And Abraham planted a grove in Beersheba, and called there on the name of the LORD, the everlasting God."*

2. While Abraham was pleased to enter into a covenant with Abimelech, he was much more concerned with the covenant He had with the everlasting God.

3. Whatever our relationships may be in this world, none of them are as important as our relationship with the Lord Jesus!

4. We will spend but a brief time in this world, but we will spend all of eternity with Jesus!

5. Even as we seek to make an impact on this present world, let us never lose sight of what is really important.

6. What ought to interest us most in this life is walking with the One who has given us eternal life.

7. In I John 2:15, it says, *"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world..."* While we are in the world, let us love the One who alone can save us after this world has passed.

1. In John 17, Jesus prayed for His disciples who would follow Him in this world. He prayed there in verse 15, *"I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil."*

2. Preaching on that text, Vance Havner once said, "We've been saved out of this world to go right back into the world to win people out of the world, and that's the only business we have in this world."^{iv}

3. With that in mind, what in this world are you doing? Abraham's story in this text challenges us about our testimony and ministry in this world.

4. Let us walk carefully through this world, and live in such a way that we bring glory to our Lord until we see Him in glory!

ⁱ Flynn, Leslie B., Your Influence Is Showing!, (Broadman Press, Nashville, TN, 1967), p. 13

ⁱⁱ Flynn, Leslie B., p. 81

ⁱⁱⁱ Stokes, David R., The Shooting Salvationist, (Steerforth Press, Hanover, NH, 2011), *Amazon Kindle Edition*

^{iv} Havner, Vance, When God Breaks Through, (Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, 2001), *Amazon Kindle Edition*