

John 8:30-59
(Genesis 22:1-19; Hebrews 11:1-2, 17-19, 39-12:2)
“Rejoicing with Abraham”

Introduction

The only records we possess written by eyewitnesses to Jesus’ life and ministry depict him making extraordinary claims about himself, claims that require any thinking person to ask the same question being asked by the religious leaders here in chapter eight of John’s gospel: Why should we believe these incredible claims you make about yourself?

As we saw last week, Jesus first response was to say, Okay, I know that the law requires two witnesses, so here are my witnesses: I testify about myself and my father testifies about me. Of course, this does not satisfy them, and Jesus concedes that *two things are needed for us to know the truth about him, and to know him*, who is the truth incarnate: first, we must stand before his cross (8:28) and realize that in his sacrifice, the promises of God are vindicated and the needs of humanity are met.

But secondly, those who have understood the truth about him by contemplating his cross need a further step in order to know him intimately: we must take up our own cross, the cross of discipleship, the cross of following him and abiding in him (8:31&32). It is in fellowship with him that we come to know him personally, whom to know is life.

Now in the text before us, we see Jesus speak a hard, confrontational word, much in the order of the prophets of Israel, beginning with Moses himself, who warned God’s people that it was not enough to be circumcised in the flesh, but that they must have their hearts circumcised (Deuteronomy 10:16) if they would be faithful descendents of Abraham. In that same prophetic tradition, Jesus challenges his listeners to realize that salvation is not merely a matter of being born into the right race or the right family, or of belonging to the right group. *It is a matter of receiving God’s life-transforming grace*. And he describes three marks of those who, like Abraham, have received God’s grace, three ways that we are to be like our father Abraham, if we are truly those who have been brought from death to life.

This morning, I want us to look together at these three marks, these three ways that Abraham serves as a model to all of us who would call ourselves God’s children, who would claim God’s promises to Abraham, through the One who fulfilled God’s promise to Abraham that through him all people would be blessed. We will note, first, that Abraham was attentive to God’s Word: he listened, meditated, and so learned to recognize God’s voice from all other voices competing for our attention. Secondly, we will see how radically he trusted and obeyed what he knew to be God’s Word. Finally, we will see Abraham rejoicing in God’s provision, even though he did not see it in its fullness as we have been permitted to see it, nevertheless he experienced it as nothing less than life-giving salvation, and rejoiced in it.

Body

1. Like Abraham, we learn to recognize God's voice (8:37&47).

How could Abraham believe that God had called him to do something as monstrous as sacrifice his son, the son of promise, the very sign of God's faithfulness to him? Because he had learned to recognize the voice of God, and had found the Lord faithful (the *lech lecha* of Genesis 12 & 22). So here Jesus calls us to make a place for his word (v.37) to hear the words of God (v.47).

2. Like Abraham, we trust and obey God's Word (8:39&51).

Abraham not only recognized the voice as God's, but also trusted God completely and obeyed him radically. Thus he is, in the words of the apostle Paul, "the father of all who believe" (Romans 4:11). How different is this biblical picture of faith – an act involving the entire being: heart, mind and will – than is our anemic notion that just giving intellectual assent is saving faith. Jesus challenges us to do as Abraham did (v.39) in keeping the word God speaks to us (v.51).

3. Like Abraham, we rejoice in God's provision (8:42&56).

Here is the heart of the matter – and in the end it is always a matter of the heart. How Abraham must have rejoiced to hear the voice telling him to stay his hand from harming his son and to see God's provision – the ram caught in the thicket! And how much more should we delight to gaze upon the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Whatever crisis, whatever challenge, whatever heartache we are facing, the gospel calls us to lift up our eyes and see, along with father Abraham, God's faithfulness in providing all we need to weather any storm life brings, and to pass through death into the victory of everlasting life. When we see God's Lamb, we love him for his sacrifice (v.42). Abraham rejoiced (v.56), and so should we, who can look back and see God's provision for our brokenness and sin, his solution to our guilt and shame, his great salvation that brings us the promise of life with him forever.

Conclusion

Jesus ends with this staggering claim: "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am" (8:58). There are only three responses to such a claim: despise Jesus as a blasphemer, pity him as a madman, or worship him as Lord. What of you today? How will you respond to Jesus? In the broken places of your life, lift up your eyes and rejoice that God has provided the one thing needed: a perfect sacrifice for sin, the vindication of all his promises, the vindication of his character, the vindication of his people, whom he has brought from death to life. With Father Abraham and all the people of God of both the old and new covenants, rejoice in the goodness and mercy of our great God and King.

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