

# Faithful Abraham Fails Again

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Preacher: Rev Kenneth I Macleod

[ 0 : 00 ] Let's turn again to chapter 20 of Genesis and reading at verse 8.

And Abimelech said to Abraham, What did you see that you did this thing? Abraham said, I did it, because I thought there is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.

We read in the book of Proverbs, it says there, That the fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord shall be kept safe.

And one of the things that we find as we are going through the life of Abraham, that there were times that Abraham displayed the fear of man, rather than the fear of God.

Abraham was a great man, a man of faith, the father of the faithful. And we must not in any way put down on the greatness of his life.

[ 1 : 22 ] He was termed the friend of God. A wonderful term that was used. Imagine having that in your gravestone. The friend of God. Well, that's who Abraham was.

And his trust in the Lord was quite extraordinary. But he had his lapses, and there were times when the fear of man rose up and kind of pushed down the fear of God.

And in a sense, the fear of man and the fear of God cannot properly coexist at the same time. It's one or the other. And Abraham is showing that there are times when the fear of man might be in the ascendancy.

And if so, then we don't act in a right way. We don't act in a God-honoring way. And that's exactly what has happened here with Abraham. Abraham has returned to his old sin and to his old way.

It would be wonderful when we were converted if all of a sudden we became completely new people. We are at one level. The Bible tells us that.

[ 2 : 29 ] Because the new birth brings new things into our life. But it would be wonderful if, when we were converted, we became morally flawless, and that we became spiritually perfect, and that we walked through this world like that every single day and every single night.

There would be no more selfish motives. There would be no more pride, no more lust, no more anger, no more wrong judgments of people and situations, no more jealousies, that everything would just be perfect.

But that cannot be. It isn't how it is, and it isn't how it will ever be. Because while there is a new birth, and we do become new people in Christ Jesus, so that we have a new heart, a new desire, and new goals, and a new sense of destiny, and all things made new, old things have passed away, and all things become new, we still live.

The new has come to live with the old. We are still 100% human. Our humanity has not gone. Who we always were is who we still are.

So that the new has come to reside within the old. And that, of course, causes conflict. It causes a struggle. Day by day and night by night.

[ 3 : 59 ] And if any Christian will say to you, I don't know anything of that struggle. Life is a breeze. Since I've been converted, everything has been plain sailing. I don't have any conflicts. I don't have any struggles.

I don't have any issues. I don't have any problems. I'd say to myself, I cannot for one moment understand that.

In fact, it is not even what the Bible says. We find the Apostle Paul, great man though he was, we find him on different occasions, bringing out how he is.

And he says, oh, you know, he said, the good that I would, I do not, and the evil that I would not, that's what I do. You and I will often find ourselves saying exactly the same thing.

So our life now is a battlefield. And we know perfectly well that the conversion of a soul takes place in a moment.

[ 4 : 59 ] Although the outworking of that in your experience might not have been in a moment, it might have been over a long period. Just the work of regeneration, it takes place, although our awareness of what has taken place might be over a long period of time.

And that is why some people, they can never pinpoint to an exact moment. And they'll say, when will you convert? I can't tell you. But I do know that God has worked within my life.

I now love him. I trust in him. I believe him. I see things in a different way to how it used to be. I know that he has done a work within my heart.

But I cannot pinpoint an exact moment or date. Many people are like that. But some people can tell you exactly when that change took place in their life.

But the point is that from God's point of view, the new birth is something that takes place just right away. The regeneration.

[ 5 : 59 ] Our sense of it might be over quite a long period of time. But that's what we're meaning, that the work of conversion, the work of regeneration is in a moment.

The work of sanctification, the work, the process of changing us and conforming us is a lifetime. A baby is born, like in a moment, although birth can take quite a long time, but a baby doesn't grow into an adult overnight.

It's a process. It's a long process that takes time. So it is for you and for me. It is a process. And God is at work all the time. And God was at work in Abraham because Abraham wasn't the finished article.

Although he has great moments of faith and there are times you look and you say, Abraham, what a man of faith. When we come to this chapter, it is very much *deja vu*.

We can almost rewind the clock way, way back down to where Abraham goes down into Egypt, back into chapter 12.

[ 7 : 11 ] That's just where Abraham was then. And here we are all these chapters later. Years and years have gone by. And Abraham is back just exactly doing what he was doing before.

And it would appear with Abraham that this was that this was a particular sin that he was prevalent in. Now I know that with Abraham there was a it was a half truth.

Because there was an element of truth in it because as Abraham explains here that that that that that that says in verse 12 besides she is indeed my sister the daughter of my father though not the daughter of my mother and she became my wife.

So there is a half truth in what he is saying but the point is that Abraham is actually he what he says is in order to deceive. It is a deliberate attempt to deceive.

So that the real truth will be hidden and that a lie will believe be believed. And that's what it's about. But it's very interesting how very often the sins of parents what their weaknesses can be passed down.

[ 8 : 27 ] You find that that Isaac you'll find if we went through the life of Isaac as well you will find that he reverts to the very same sin as Abraham. And when you come to Jacob's life Jacob in fact was such a deceiver.

He was somebody who was known for his deception. So it seemed to have been a family trait that seemed to go down from one generation to the next.

You find that for instance in David. David again an amazing man a man after God's own heart but if Abraham had one if David had one weakness it was for women and that was highlighted within his life.

And we see that even more so in his son Solomon because Solomon his son had 700 wives and 300 concubines.

This was not something that was something that was authorized by God. And the sad thing in Solomon's case is that in this later years remember Solomon was this bright brilliant God-fearing young man and when God appeared to him in a dream saying right Solomon you're taking over the kingdom what is it that you want ask me and we remember what Solomon asked for I said Lord please I'm just like a child give me wisdom so that I will know how to go in and how to go out how to rule this great people because it's like it's overwhelming me please Lord make me wise and God was so delighted with Solomon's answer he said yes I will make you wiser than any but I'll also give you what you didn't ask for I'll give you wealth I'll give you power I'll give you dominion over your enemies so here's this bright vibrant man but he was plagued with this problem of amassing to himself virtually every woman that came his way and you know the sad thing was at the end of the day it's really sad you go to 1st Kings chapter 11 it tells us that in his old age his wives turned his heart away to worship idols to look to idols so that he did not follow the

[ 10 : 48 ] Lord completely in the way that his father David followed the Lord so you see our sins can be we often think our sin is just this is this is this is it's got nothing to do with anybody else well we can often see it following on a particular weakness within the generations it also affects people round about we sometimes think our sin won't affect anybody but me well you ask Israel in the time of Joshua and when Achan sinned and he buried his sin and he kept it secret remember quite a number of Israeli soldiers died because of Achan's sin if you could speak to the sailors who were out on the sea the night Jonah ran away from God or tried to run away from God and there was that horrendous storm it wasn't just Jonah's boat that was caught up in the storm but all the other boats round about where they were fearing for their lives because of one man's disobedience so don't think that your sin is private the knock-on effects can be powerful as we see so often but anyway here is

Abraham and we find that he has moved down to Gerar which is into kind of well strange territory it's into kind of Philistine country and we don't know why he moved maybe it was as a result of what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah and maybe he thought I've got time for a change somewhere but all of a sudden he felt very vulnerable because he was in a place that he didn't know and he felt threatened and as he says the fear of God is not in this place at all obviously by everything he could see it was a place of idolatry so he came to this assumption that there was no fear of God in the place and so he says to Sarah look we've got to revert back to plan A or plan B or whatever plan it was you're now my sister you're not my wife and the thing is we've got to remember that Sarah is now old but we've also got to remember that God rejuvenated this remember this that

God had said when we saw back in chapter 18 he had promised that at this time about this time next year I will return and Sarah will have a child so God was rejuvenating both Abraham and Sarah so maybe that had a physical impact that she was obviously looking younger than her than the years than her actual years so she was still a very attractive woman and Abraham knew this has all the potential for trouble I will be killed and the king will take Sarah so this this is where we're at and this is one of the funny things about sin is that so often and I'm sure as you look over your own life and as I look over my own life that it's like Abraham that you find yourself so often in sin coming back to the same place you know there are times maybe you have wept over sin and you have so confessed sin and you say Lord

I'm done I'm done with this please grant me the strength and the grace so that I will forevermore turn away and I will follow you with all my heart and you think that's it and yet it's not and you're back back where you were and you say to yourself how is it possible how is this and you can't get over God's forgiveness and God's grace and God's love and God's patience and God's mercy to you well that's where Abraham was back exactly where he was again here's the father of the faithful and he's back lapsing in the very same way again and so we find that God comes to Abimelech because Abimelech has taken Sarah and God comes to Abimelech and he says to Abimelech Abimelech you're a dead man that woman that you've taken is another man's wife and Abimelech says I didn't know he's holding up his hands to God and he says with the integrity in my heart what I did

I did in all instances I did not know that you belonged to somebody else and God says I know that I recognize that but he says I am the one who has kept you from touching her from sinning and so we find that Abimelech is completely disturbed and he calls and the first thing in the morning he tells him what has happened and then he calls for Abraham and he says to Abraham what have you done what have you done and you know this must have been a very difficult moment for Abraham because he has to he has to he's kind of he realizes I've really got it wrong here and so in fairness to Abraham he's honest and he says I didn't think that the fear of God was here at all and I thought you would kill me in order to get my wife so I very simply said she is my sister do you know if we came if we had never looked at anything before of the life of

[16:19] Abraham and just picked it up at chapter 20 you would say to yourself if somebody said you know one of these men is a really good man a real believer in the Lord trusts in the Lord completely and the other doesn't which is which you probably say to Abimelech seems to be the better man here there seems to be a real honesty about this man there seems to be looks like he's got the fear of God in him his the way he acts is honorable right throughout Abraham Paul not too sure about this man seems to be a wee bit dodgy wee bit of a deceiver and you know that can be a real rebuke to the Christian because do you know that there are times when that can be enacted out in this world where sometimes the behavior and sometimes the standards of the world in situations and locations are better than the Christians that ought never to be but sometimes it is the case that sometimes some people who aren't

Christians their standards and their way that they deal with people their integrity of character their behavior sometimes will put Christians to shame in the way that their behavior is as we say it ought not to be that is wrong but that's exactly what we're finding here that Abimelech at this point seems to be coming out better than Abraham and so it's important that we always examine our motives as to what we're doing why we're doing what we're doing remember the world is what the world is always watching the Christian sometimes we forget that and they're judging us I know sometimes their standards of judgment are not biblical standards but they're always making assessments and when they look at the Christian they say okay that person that man that woman is a Christian so is that how a Christian operates is that how a Christian deals and things so it's a very it's very challenging for us that morally and ethically in all our ways that we seek to be

Christian like in all that we are in life and I'm sure every single one of us as we examine our lives we have to say that there are times we have to hold up our hands and say Lord forgive me because my witness wasn't very good there I didn't do as I should have that wasn't becoming for a Christian and I think it's very important that we face up to these things and you know one of the things that comes through from here is and I say this very reverently that Abraham through what he did gave God more far more work than if he had simply trusted him and what I mean by that is this God says to Abimelech I am the one who kept you from sinning it was me I kept you back from touching that woman that was God's intention all along when Abraham and Sarah went in there if Abraham had been honest and said from the start this is

Sarah she's my wife God was going to look after them that was his intention that was his purpose he was going to look after Abraham and he was going to look after Sarah and neither of them would have been touched because God was protecting him but Abraham wasn't trusting God so he took matters into his own hands so he tells a white lie he deceives and as a result Sarah is taken so that in a sense that's why I mean that God has to do more in order now she's taken and she's in the most dangerous place because at that time in the land there the king had the right to any woman that he chose well obviously any single woman that he chose and that's exactly what he did so you see it's so important that we trust the Lord in everything God's purposes for us are such that we really really need to trust him

Abraham at that moment was not resembling the Lord because one of the things we've got to remember is that God is a God of truth the spirit is a spirit of truth the word is the word of truth Jesus said I am the way the truth and the life in Proverbs God tells us that there are seven things that are a particular abomination to him and one of these things is a lying tongue because when we lie we resemble the devil we don't resemble God we resemble the devil because the devil we're told is the father of lies so a lie is not a little thing in God's sight might be an hour it's only a lie I didn't tell the truth but it's no big deal you know we live in a day where lying is just it's a way of life and people will say that even in politics now I'm not saying that every politician and everything but so often so often in so many walks of life deception is being used to wrong food people to deceive people and that in God's sight is awful it is real sin deception and lying reflect the devil they don't reflect

[ 22 : 07 ] God so remember that the lying tongue is an abomination in the sight of God but you know what Abraham did cost him many things it cost him we could say it cost him his testimony or his witness you see he couldn't Abraham because of this he couldn't witness properly anymore you see when Abraham he's come into this place and he's going to tell them about God about the living God and he says you know I want to tell you I see you're worshipping other gods let me tell you about the living and true God oops Abraham can you tell about the living and true God true truth because you started off on a lie and people are going to say well if you've told a lie if you've tried to deceive us right at the very start how do we know how can we believe the God that you worship is true so you see straight away

Abraham had crippled his very testimony his very witness right from the very very start his ministry again it cost him his ministry because rather than being a source of blessing which he normally was he's now a source of cursing because we find what has happened verse 18 the Lord had closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah Abraham's wife you see all of a sudden God's judgment had come upon that place because of Abraham so rather than being a source of blessing he is now has brought an element of curse and what Abraham did actually risked the very covenant it risked the whole process of the world's salvation remember how God had made this great promise to Abraham and he says you know your wife Sarah she is going to have a child and earlier he had said the whole world is going to be blessed through you and your seed so that from the

Abrahamic line right down and of course we know when we follow it all the way down to Jesus Christ this is the fulfillment of the promise has come in Jesus and at this particular moment Abraham is jeopardizing God's very purposes and plans we know of course that God overrules all things but from a human point of view Abraham is putting into jeopardy the very covenant promises of God see it's no little thing just to tell a lie and so we find that that here is this Abraham this this as we see this this great man and yet we see how gracious God is because God overrules everything and we find that Abimelech he restores because God tells Abimelech Abraham's a prophet and he'll pray for you and your household everything will be healed and we find that that Abimelech he says to

Abraham in verse 15 all the land is before you dwell where it pleases but you know you can't miss here there's a wee cynical dig from Abimelech because in verse 16 he says to behold my and to Sarah he said behold I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver he doesn't call say I haven't given your husband he says I have given your brother so there's a wee kind of dig there at Abraham and at Sarah because of what they've done and so we find that in the end God hears Abraham's prayer and heals Abimelech and his household you know there are many things that come out of this one of the things is that God's people as we said earlier on are not perfect and one of the most difficult things that we face is our failure but you know we are encouraged from the word of

God to see that yes God's people fail but failure is never the end and that's one of the great things that comes through comes through in the life of Abraham comes through in the life of Jacob comes through in the life of David comes through in the life of all these great men who have who have who have experienced failure but God work turns it round in the end even Samson in the day of Samson's death who in his great his great work in God's hand was to be somebody who took the battle to the Philistines the Philistines were the great enemy of God's people and Samson had been the scourge of the Philistines and yet in his death he destroyed more than throughout his life so that God was even able in that to turn it round that's what God does with his people even in the failure he's able to turn it round into victory but let us not put ourselves into the place of failure let us not be presumptuous in our life but that the fear of God might be in our heart and that we may seek by his grace to live lives of honesty and integrity as we journey through this world and if today you don't know the

[ 27 : 58 ] Lord as your own then you're missing out on so much because here is the God of heaven and earth who rules and overrules all things there's a version proverbs which says the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord and he turns it whichever way he will well here's a classic example he had Abimelech's heart in his hand and he turned it whichever way do we have a sense of this God as our God that he is the ruler over governments over authorities over communities are we do we limit him in our prayers do we kind of hold back well may we have bold prayers big prayers may we go to him seeking great things from him because he is a great God and may we seek personal union with him in and through his son the Lord Jesus Christ let us pray oh Lord our God we pray today that we might indeed remember more and more of the wonder of who you are and that we may recognize that even although we sin and our sin is so often painful we realize that in your hand and when we confess our sin that not only are you faithful and just to forgive our sin but that you are able even to bring good out of what is evil it is amazing we see that over and over happening in your word where even

Jacob Joseph said to his brothers you meant it for evil but God meant it for good oh Lord we give thanks for the amazing supernatural way that you so often work in people's lives bless us then we pray bless us with your grace and with your mercy and with your peace bless a cup of tea and coffee in the hall afterwards and take us to our home safely for giving us our sin in Jesus name amen we're going to conclude singing in the 80th psalm psalm number 80 from the Scottish Psalter and we're going to sing the last three verses of the psalm it's on page 334 psalm number 80 at verse 17 oh set thy hand oh let thy hand be still upon the man of thy right hand the son of man whom for thyself thou madest strong to stand so hence forth we will not go back nor turn from thee at all oh do thou quicken us and we upon thy name will call turn us again lord god of hosts and upon us vouch save to make thy countenance to shine and so we shall be safe these last three verses verses of psalm 18 oh let thy hand be still upon the man of thy right hand the son of man whom for thyself are made strong to stand so henceforth we will not go back nor turn from thee at all oh do and quicken us and we upon thy name will call turn us again lord god of hosts and upon us thy say to make thy countenance to shine and so we shall be saved now may the grace mercy and peace of god the father son and holy spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forever more amen