

Living (And Dying) By Faith

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"By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; but it was he to whom it was said, 'In Isaac your descendants shall be called.' He considered that God is able to raise men even from the dead; from which he also received him back as a type." (Hebrews 11:17-19)

Last evening, after a busy day in town and seeing God's faithfulness on display in some unexpected ways, I finally had a chance to sit down outside, enjoy the fading evening (it's getting darker earlier - Fall is on it's way) and have some devotional time alone with God. For reasons which aren't clear in retrospect I found myself in Hebrews, Chapter 11, reading about Abraham and reflecting on the "life of faith".

Several things caught my attention as I reflected on the whole episode. Abraham and Sarah had been walking by faith for over 25 years. For all that time they had trusted God to guide and provide. Now, you would think that after more than 25 years of living by faith, living in tents with no home to call his own and awaiting the fulfillment of God's promise in the birth of Isaac, God would have cut Abraham some slack. After all, by now Abraham was well over 100 years old. Isaac had been born. The promise had been fulfilled. A long overdue rest was now in order, right? But, no. God looked into Abraham and saw something in the deepest character of this elderly saint and obedient servant, something that still required a profound death to self.

Sanctified speculation is the order of the day when it comes to explaining why God did what He did with Abraham. So, allow me to speculate. The promise of God - fulfilled in the person of Isaac - had become an idol for Abraham. There is a genuine sense in which idolatry is simply misplaced faith - faith with a wrong object. God now had to correct this problem in this faithful servant. God's plan (unknown to Abraham) wasn't to kill Isaac. God's plan was to "kill" Abraham, and to bring about a profound "death to self". God's plan was to kill the idolatry that had taken root in Abraham's heart and to transform the "faith" which Abraham had known up til now into a much deeper and genuine trust-with-fear.

True, Isaac had been the fulfillment of a great promise made some 25 years earlier. Everything God had done for Abraham to this point in his life pointed to the birth of the promised heir - Isaac. And Abraham had believed God and had walked accordingly. Isaac had been born. Now it was no longer about faith in a promise. So, there was something else at play. Such faith in such promises can gradually - over time - become an idolatry. In order to root out this idolatry God found it necessary to tell Abraham to do the unthinkable. Sacrifice the promise. In the process Abraham would die to himself and his idolatries. In such a moment of spiritual crisis faith in a promise is transformed into a genuine trust-with-fear in a God who is bigger than His promises. In that moment He becomes a Savior Who, in the face of the apparent death of all the promises He has made to us, is able to give life to the dead, even dead promises.

There are days when living by faith and talking about it in such a way that those around you can see what God is doing in your life is almost like walking naked through church. It can be a humbling - if not down right disturbing - experience for everyone involved. As I sat in the fading evening light and reflected on all these things I found myself weeping before the Lord and asking, "Lord, are there promises that have become idols in my life that I need to die toward?"

As you know, over the past few weeks God has told us to shut down The Parousia Network and to walk away from the idea of forming a house church network or association. Now came the harder question. Was there more? "Lord, what about forming a Christian self-publishing company. What about "My Brother's Keeper"? Am I supposed to sacrifice those, too? How will you provide for us?"

Sometimes God's most profound answer to our cries is His silence as He allows death-to-self to do it's work on our secret idolatries. Like His plan for Isaac, it isn't really God's plan to kill all of your or my dreams, dreams which are the product of promises He Himself gave us. If the truth be known (usually after the fact), both Isaac and our dreams are quite safe in God's hands. We are the intended victims of this Divine sacrifice. God's plan is to "kill" us and the idolatries which we have allowed to take root in our hearts. He is a jealous God and He will not share our worship with anything - even promises He has made or fulfillment He has granted. Just ask Abraham.

Just so you know, Gale and I are doing fine. Yes, we still have needs and are still dealing with the inevitable ripple effects of closing down The Parousia Network. We have placed both "Rising River Media" and "My Brother's Keeper" on the altar. Without God's approval and provision, neither project can move forward. At the same time we feel that God has given us the go ahead for two book projects: "Joy In The Journey", a devotional book on (drum roll please) living by faith (O.K., like you didn't see that one coming!) and **"The Inextinguishable Blaze: God's Call to Holiness, Repentance, Intimacy and Spiritual Awakening"**. We take encouragement that if God is truly calling us to continue writing and doing art (Gale plans to illustrate "Joy In The Journey" with original art) then He must have publishing plans for us. We would appreciate your

ongoing prayers and financial support.

I don't know what you are going through right now, but I do know (based upon numerous responses to my two previous letters) that God is shaking many of you personally and is shaking many house church ministries. My suspicion is that God is challenging our idolatries. And, yes, even organic house church ministries can become idolatries. Your idolatry may even be something that God has told you to do and given you promises to encourage you along the way. If it can happen to an Abraham, it can happen to you. Trust me on this one.

A final thought. I believe that Abraham went up Mount Moriah a secret slave and idolater, but he came back down the mountain a free man and a true worshiper. Death to ourselves and to our secret idolatries is a liberating experience, turning spiritual slaves and idolaters into free men (and women) and true worshipers. How about you?