

YE ARE MY FRIENDS

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We read in the Word of God that God took His chosen saints and servants at different times to mountain tops to reveal His plan for them. It is good to study each of such cases individually. Now we want to see how God took Abraham to Mt.Moriah.

God first appeared to Abraham in Genesis 12. But He took him to Mount Moriah about forty-six years later. God had to take Abraham through many different experiences during those forty-six years, before he was ready to come to Mount Moriah. Whenever we desire to get a mountain-top experience of the power and grace of God, we must be prepared to go through the many experiences by which God in His perfect wisdom prepares us His children. It may not be necessary for everyone to go through such experiences for forty-six years, but you will find that certain periods of such experiences from God are necessary. Even though we may read the Bible prayerfully and carefully every day, even though we may have the privileges of attending Bible Studies by the best teachers available, having fellowship with the saints of God in a living assembly, and having spiritual parents, yet for our spiritual education and maturity there is a time factor. God has a plan which may extend over a period of less or more years. Whatever it may be, it is very necessary to pass through these painful and trying experiences, in order to be prepared for the Mountain of God.

Now God had planned from eternity to make Abraham His friend. In Isaiah 41:8 He calls him "Abraham my friend", but to become the friend of God, Abraham had to be prepared that he might be able to enjoy the friendship of God. Mount Moriah might also be called the Mount of God's friendship. For forty-six years God had been preparing Abraham step by step to make him His friend. In every human heart there is a longing to have a friend. Even small children show their desire to have a companion or friend, because of that inward longing. In our school days each one of us had our own special friend. Again in college there were special friends, and in later life it is a peculiar joy to meet old school and college friends.

Several years ago I passed through Calcutta and there I met a very old friend of mine whom I had not seen for thirty-one years. We had been thick friends in college days, but when I went to England, we lost touch. Then after several years he saw my name in the newspaper and wrote to me. So we began to correspond. When I went to Calcutta I visited him, and what a joy it was to see him and the whole family. He called his wife and children to meet me, his old friend, and I had the great joy of giving them the Gospel for two hours. This illustrates my point that in the heart of every man there is a longing to have a friend. But it is not very easy to have good friends, and that is why many are disappointed. Some have been friends for two or three years and then have separated. I am sure there are many who have been sadly disappointed because of broken friendship. But here God was speaking to Abraham as His true friend. (To be continued.)

If you want to have a true friend in your life, or to be a true friend to someone, first learn to cultivate real friendship with the living Savior. As you begin to grow in the friendship of the Lord Jesus Christ, He will give you many loving friends everywhere. Before that, you may have shown much affection to certain friends, and spent your money on them. In order to show your friendship, you may have written

very long letters. You may have even sat up at night and exhausted all your vocabulary to show your affection. When the reply came after three or four weeks, and when you opened it with trembling hands, and found nothing but a few formal lines thanking you for your letter, and apologizing for the delay in replying, your face fell and you had no desire to eat or drink. That is human nature. When however, you have learned by experience to be the friend of God, you will see that He Himself will give you many loving friends who will give you love unspeakable.

The disciples were feeling very sad because the Lord Jesus had told them in a very plain way how He was going to be betrayed and crucified. They were all feeling downcast, and did not even know what to say. But as they walked in the dark night in the small path leading to Gethsemane, our Lord said, "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you" (John 15: 15). They thought they were being left alone and forsaken, but He called them His friends. Servants cannot understand anything about the master, but a friend can, and that is why the Lord made known to His disciples all what He heard of His Father. That is divine friendship.

God was leading Abraham to the very same friendship. "And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do" (Gen. 18: 17). What a wonder this is! God had every right to do what He wished. His time had come to judge the inhabitants of those wicked cities called Sodom and Gomorrah and He was about to do so. But He said: "How can I hide it from Abraham?" Abraham was not saying: "Oh God! You must tell me everything," because he had not yet understood the heart of God for him. No doubt, he had been obeying God as far as he could, but he had not yet entered into the heart of God. Now God was saying about him. "How can I hide my counsel from Abraham?" This is God's purpose for you and me also. We are redeemed, purchased, washed and cleansed by His blood, not to live as we like. No, we have been called to be the friends of the most high and living God. God wants you to climb that Mountain of Friendship and then you will know how God, as your friend, reveals and shows you many truths and mysteries. If you are really a child of God and if you are truly born again there will be a great longing in your heart to know the Bible. This was my longing too. I went on reading the Bible sometimes for 12 to 14 hours a day. But that did not solve my problem. Bible knowledge itself does not satisfy our hunger. Similarly, I thought that by spending many hours in prayer I would be satisfied. I tried that too, and whenever and wherever possible I spent hours in prayer, but even then I could see defeat in my life. Then I began to long for some miracles and through prayer and by God's grace, I saw many miracles also. But even that did not satisfy me. But when I understood God's purpose that He, the holy, just, mighty and great God wanted me to be His friend and enjoy pure friendship with Him, I was satisfied. God Himself began to speak to me and taught me things which I could not learn from any man. In other words, He taught me how to be His co-laborer, partner and friend.

Let us now consider a few points about the friendship of God with Abraham. "And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am" (Gen. 22: 1). First of all, God tempted Abraham, i.e. He proved or tested him. Now if you want to climb the mountaintop of friendship with God and if you want to enjoy the friendship of God, then be prepared to be proved and tried by God's own testings.

If you want to climb the mountain top of friendship with God and if you want to enjoy the friendship of God, be prepared to be proved and tried by God's own testings, as He proved Abraham (Gen. 22: 1).

When a watchmaker wants to use a piece of steel for a watch spring, he has to put the steel through many tests before using it. Only the watchmaker knows what kind of spring is required for the watch. In the same way, when any metal is to be used for an aeroplane, that piece of metal will be first proved by many tests. It is only then that the metal will be fit for use in the aeroplane. In the same way, God Who alone knows our real ministry on earth and in heaven, has to apply every kind of test in our lives, so that we may be found fit and worthy. We as believers should never question or doubt God, demanding of Him why this or that has happened in our lives. Believe me, every test, however severe, is very necessary to the one who desires to be a friend of God. Some of the tests will be very painful, and the enemy will try to suggest that you are being punished by God for your failure in the past. If however, you have understood God's purpose, then remember, you are forgiven completely. When you have confessed your sins and have put things right with God and man, then your sins are forgiven, covered and washed. His grace will never dig them up again. Your part is to be faithful and sincere in your repentance and confession, and obey God, putting all things right, with your fellowmen. Afterwards let God try and prove you by any test. All the saints of God, down the world's history, have been proved in different ways, and were found faithful.

We read that when God called Abraham, he said, "Behold, here I am!" He could not have said that so quickly in the beginning, but he had been prepared by God for forty -six years. His ears had become sensitive to the voice of God. God spoke and he heard and responded immediately. He did not say, "Lord, give me five or ten minutes!" Many people hear God speaking in a meeting or in their quiet time or in prayer time, but they answer, "God! Please give me ten minutes; I will consult my darling wife and give you a definite reply. She is a very good wife and the best woman in the whole world. Please God, just wait for a few minutes and I will ask her permission and then come:" Abraham did not say, "Let me consult Sarah and then I will come to you," for he had been truly prepared by God. In a subtle way the devil has deceived many God's servants, teachers and believers. They allow some man, some woman, some relation to come between God and themselves. But Abraham's answer was, "Behold, here am I", which meant: "Oh God! I am fully ready, and prepared. You tell me and I will do it:" If you are not clear as to God's voice, then wait, because in some cases it takes a month or two, or more to know God's will. But when God speaks and commands, you must say at once, "Behold, I am here:"

In Gen. 22:3 we read, "Abraham rose up early in the morning:" Isaac was Sarah's son also, and no doubt his mother must have loved him more dearly than even Abraham did. But without consulting Sarah, Abraham was ready to take Isaac as God had commanded. Some may say that the customs in India and in America are different. You may say that American wives are different from Indian wives. They demand everything! -and to maintain peace, men have to tell everything to their wives! It may be an American wife, English wife, or an Indian wife; a graduate wife or an illiterate wife, the divine law is the same for every country. In the work of God, and the things of God, it is the same divine law that is operative. If you make any alteration in any divine law, you will bring great weakness in your testimony and loss in your ministry. You could never say that Abraham did not love Sarah, or that Sarah did not love Abraham. God spoke first to Abraham, and though he loved Sarah, he

had already learned a lesson that he should not listen to his wife before obeying God. It was Sarah who had advised him to go to Hagar. Without consulting God he had obeyed her, and the mistake of that day is still being seen and felt in the whole world in the seed of Ishmael... Divine laws are not to be trifled with. Abraham had learned that lesson, that when God speaks, He must be obeyed. So without consulting any person, he obeyed God immediately. We must never try to change divine laws by human wisdom.

At God's command Abraham went to the land of Moriah. "Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off" (Gen. 22:4). He did not tell even Isaac what he was going to do with him. We do not find the least anxiety in the heart of Abraham. When Isaac questioned him about the offering he said, "My son, God will provide" (verse 8). He was not avoiding Isaac's question. When he said that God would provide, he actually believed that the Lord would provide. Literally the meaning of Moriah is, "God will provide". Here we see the kind of faith that had been created and developed in the heart of Abraham. The true friendship that God offers depends upon a strong, living and simple faith. Alas! For most of us, we have no faith. Even though we talk about faith, and preach and sing about faith, when we face the actual test, we have no faith. We know how the devil again and again brings some doubt into our hearts. Even though we have proved God on many occasions and many times He has given us victory over the enemy's devices, doubts still come into our hearts. Before holding a Holy Convocation we have so many questions in our mind. We ask ourselves, "What will happen tomorrow? We have prepared for only a thousand guests for the Holy Convocation". Suddenly panic comes in. "What about Wednesday? What about Thursday?" And for a short time there will be panic and doubt. Then we remember that for the past several years we have been having many Holy Convocations, and every year God has not only met every need but also allowed us never to keep any bill waiting for payment, nor have we refused anyone. God meets every need without hints of any kind. Even so at times we have known that for a few minutes a little doubt comes in till the Lord reassures us with His promise that He will surely provide.

In the same way, we often find that when we are asked to give a message we feel so dry, empty and weak. The throat gets dry and the brain tired. But when we seek His face He provides His message. You will find the same in every test. I know it by experience. He is faithful. I have seen some people very worried as their families increase. They begin to wonder how they will clothe their children, or educate them, or get them married. If they are girls, the problem is still worse. I am talking about believing parents and even God's servants. Yet surely if God can provide for one, He can provide for ten children. Where is your faith? Whenever God blesses, He provides. Whatsoever burden we may have to bear, He gives abundant grace, yea, extra grace for that burden. Abraham knew these words were spoken by God and not by man. That is why he was prepared to do as God told him. God said, "Take your son!" and he took him. He took wood also. Then God told him to build an altar, and he built it, without any question or doubt in his mind. That is real friendship with this mighty God. When God says, "Yes!" I say, "Yes", and when God says, "No", I say "No". When God says, "Go!" I go, when He says, "Stay", I stay and when He says, "Speak", I speak. You find that such friendship will carry you up every mountain. Your sufferings and trials are all preparation for such a friendship.

In Genesis 18 God told Abraham how He was going to judge Sodom and Gomorrah, but now in chapter 22 God wanted to tell him what was going to happen

through his seed. "That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies" (v. 17,). That seed is the Lord Jesus Christ and Abraham was thus a partaker of all the blessings which were to come through that Seed. He would enjoy the fruits of the victory of that Seed over all the enemies of God, and over all the powers of darkness. We too have the right in Him to enjoy the fruit of His victory, which will ensure not only a happy life upon the earth, but also a share in His triumphant victory over all the powers of darkness in heavenly places. That is what it means to be a friend of God.

Genesis 22:13 reveals something more of what the friendship of God had for Abraham. "And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns...'. The ram was caught in the thicket, not because it would run away somewhere. God would have made that very same ram to appear right before Abraham without being bound in a thicket. But God was teaching him some important lessons. After he had passed the final test, he saw the ram caught in the bush. This ram is a type of the Lord Jesus Christ. God was saying to Abraham, "You have obeyed my voice. Now I am bound to bless you and your seed. Now command Me. Continue to command me". "Thus saith the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask me of things to come ...concerning the work of my hands, command ye me" (Isaiah. 45:11). God is willing to bless us if we obey Him. Most of us want God to listen to us and work for us. But we do not obey Him. The Lord Jesus wants us to command from Him the blessing of God for all nations, and also victory over all enemies. God took Abraham on the mountain top, that he might learn how to command the best things from God for all the generations to come. Do you have a desire to climb that mountain of God's friendship? Do you want to be a friend of God? If so, you will find the whole secret revealed in the life of Abraham and especially in Genesis chapter 22.