

God's plan is always better than our alternatives

Sermon for Sunday, September 19, 2010
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Genesis 12:10-20

[Following up on a children's message which talked about what they are afraid of.]

Fear isn't something that affects only children. It targets adults as well. And since adults have more money, more power, more resources, the kind of trouble they can get into when they let their fears dominate their lives are even greater. We see an example of this in today's passage about the life of Abraham and Sarah.

It starts out innocently enough:

Genesis 12:10, Today's English Version:

But there was a famine in Canaan, and it was so bad that Abram went farther south to Egypt, to live there for a while.

Their intention was a temporary visit, until the rains returned and the land could support them once again. They weren't going to just sit around and wait for God to miraculously feed them. Some people expect God to do their work for them, instead of accepting responsibility for what they can do for themselves.

But it wasn't long until the plan went off track.

1) Fear is faith in the enemy; God's way is best

Genesis 12:11–13, Today's English Version:

When he was about to cross the border into Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "You are a beautiful woman. When the Egyptians see you, they will assume that you are my wife, and so they will kill me and let you live. Tell them that you are my sister; then because of you they will let me live and treat me well."

You know what I just said about accepting responsibility to do what you can do for yourself? Well, Abram took that to the extreme. He figured, "I'm going to be a target once we get inside Egypt. I'll have to deceive people if I'm to survive." Technically speaking, he wasn't *lying*: Sarai and he have the same father, but different mothers, so she is his half-sister [see Genesis 20:12]. He's just hiding a big part of the truth.

You and I are tempted to do the same thing. You want to sell your old car. A potential buyer comes to look at it, someone who doesn't know much about how to test a car. "Is it in good shape?", he asks you. You answer proudly, "Just look at it! Isn't it a beauty?" And yes, it

does look quite nice, with the fresh paint hiding the places where you covered over the rust. You haven't lied, but you haven't told the whole truth. Three months later, when a big hole appears in the side panel, what is the new owner going to think? What will he think about you, and about the Jesus you follow? Are a few hundred dollars worth that much?

Listen to what God's word says about living by fear.

Proverbs 29:25, New Living Translation:

**Fearing people is a dangerous trap,
but trusting the Lord means safety.**

Henry Blackaby sums it up this way: "Fear is faith in the enemy." Fear replaces our faith in God to be our security. That leads to all kinds of trouble.

Faith is like the opposite of fear. Someone put it this way: "Faith is living without scheming." When you put your faith in God as your security, you don't need to hide the truth, make up stories, manipulate other people, and generally make enemies. You do your part, and trust God to do his part.

In fact, when you are going through trouble, the most important question is not "*How* can I get out of this?" but, "*What* can I get out of this?" In other words, how am I going to grow as a result of what's happening?

2) Fear makes us self-centered; God's way is best

When Abram left his home and went to a strange land, he was living by faith. Following God was his top priority. Now he is living by fear. Looking out for himself is the new number one. That's what fear does to us: it distorts our priorities.

With this scheme that Abram has cooked up, he is thinking only about himself. It apparently doesn't bother him that he will be forcing his wife to commit adultery. Nor is his conscience bothered that some innocent Egyptian is going to be party to this adultery, without even knowing it.

The tragedy of all this is that Abram probably thinks he's very smart. "What a brilliant plan I came up with!" Does that ring any bells for you? Can you see yourself in this picture?

Hear what God's word says:

Proverbs 3:5-7, Today's English Version:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Never rely on what you think you know. Remember the Lord in everything you do, and he will show you the right way. Never let yourself think that you are wiser than

you are; simply obey the Lord and refuse to do wrong.

3) Fear paralyzes our witness; God's way is best

Genesis 12:17-20, Today's English Version:
But because the king had taken Sarai, the Lord sent terrible diseases on him and on the people of his palace. Then the king sent for Abram and asked him, "What have you done to me? Why didn't you tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say that she was your sister, and let me take her as my wife? Here is your wife; take her and get out!" The king gave orders to his men, so they took Abram and put him out of the country, together with his wife and everything he owned.

Let's go back again to the beginning: last week, when Abram and Sarai left their home. Here is part of God's promise to them:

Genesis 12:3, Today's English Version:
"I will bless those who bless you, But I will curse those who curse you. And through you I will bless all the nations."

"Through you I will bless all the nations." Because Abram lived by fear, instead of bringing a blessing to the people of Egypt, Abram was a curse upon them! When they found out his trickery, they sent him packing. They wanted nothing to do with him ever again.

Isn't this ironic? Foreigners who don't know the Lord end up being more righteous than Abram who knows God closely.

Can you imagine what they might say when Abram comes to them and says, "Would you like to come to our church on Sunday? We have great music and a great preacher. I'm sure it will be a blessing to you."

I expect they have had all the "blessings" they want from Abram! We should all have a good look in the mirror, and ask ourselves, "How is my witness to the people around me?"

A final word

A casual observer of this episode might conclude, "What happened to Abraham wasn't all bad. Pharaoh gave Abraham a lot of wealth. God forgave Abraham's sin, and he started over again. So, what's the big problem?"

The "big problem" is that *everything Abraham received in Egypt later caused trouble*. Because of their great

wealth, Abraham and their nephew Lot could not live together and had to separate (chapter 13). Having had a taste of the pleasures of Egypt, Lot started measuring everything by what he had seen there (chapter 13:10–11) and this led to his downfall and the ruin of his family. Sarai got an Egyptian female slave in the bargain, named Hagar. Her relationship with Hagar brought bitterness and grief into their home (chapter 16).

Turning away from God's ways *never* brings benefits. It might appear that way for a time, but the end result is always bad.

The good news, as I mentioned, is that God did forgive Abram. They left Egypt, but God was still with them, and would be their Lord and God. The same is true for us. Even when we fail and give into temptation, when we go against what we know is right, it is not the end. Jesus is our Saviour, and we can come back to him.

Theme for today: What are you afraid of? Everyone has something. Faith doesn't mean never being afraid. Rather, faith means putting our trust in God, rather than in the things we fear. "Fear," says Henry Blackaby, "is faith in the enemy."