

Fear Not Abram

Genesis 15:1-7, Epiphany Sunday III

January 25, 2009

Beloved of the Lord.....In the sight of God, is our nation good or evil? January 21st of this week marked the 36th anniversary of Roe vs. Wade. In 1973 women were legally given the right to abort, which is to murder their own unborn child. Today, one out of every four children in our country are murdered. This week our president signed an executive order which provides U.S. funding for abortions in foreign countries. At our state capital in St. Paul this week, some peacefully protested this abomination called abortion. They were right to do so for it is never a sin to speak the truth. But there was also a man who did not peacefully protest, but instead he rammed his SUV into Minnesota's only abortion clinic. It was ironic that the worker there was thankful no one was hurt. Obviously she had forgotten the purpose of the clinic, to murder the unborn who cannot defend themselves, all in the name of choice. But what choice does the child have? How long do you think God can tolerate the sins of an evil nation? How long can Almighty God hold back His burning anger against such murderers? "Our God is a consuming fire!"

We may in our heart think, "That's right! Look how evil our nation is! These wicked people certainly deserve all of God's anger and wrath, and if God smites this nation to the ground for their sins, they have it coming." But there is a grave error in such thinking if we only condemn others. For the external actions, the external sins performed by our external members are nothing in comparison to the filth which flows out of our own sinful heart. Jesus said, "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man." Our heart is an open sewer in the sight of God from which flows every vice and sin. The question is not whether or not we've committed some external transgression like abortion or murder or adultery: the question is whether we are murderers and adulterers at heart. Jesus said, "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him." To hate is to murder. Jesus said, "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." To lust is to commit adultery. We must put away this childish and superficial thought that as long as we have not done the deed, we have committed no sin. If God placed us side by side with the doctor who performs abortions, or the driver who sought to be judge and jury, "Oh Lord who shall stand?" So when it comes to the sins of our nation, and the wrath of God against this nation, let us all confess together, "God be merciful to me, a sinner."

There is only one safe place of refuge to which we can flee from the wrath and condemnation of God. We flee to the safe haven, the gentle arms of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. For His arms were once outstretched and opened wide on the cross toward a world of sinners. Christ died for all, not just some. Through the cross, Jesus does not turn away the sinner who is sorry for his sins. His blood absolves all men, declaring all sins forgiven! Even our sins of murder are forgiven! "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.....Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ....For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved!" May our hearts rejoice daily that we are His adopted children by faith. Jesus has saved us from our sins of murder.

We begin our lesson today with Abram, who "believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness." In the midst of faith Abram struggled with God's promise that he would be the father of many nations. Many years after this promise Abram yet had no children. In like manner we today we too know well the promises of God, His grace, mercy, forgiveness, and life everlasting, yet we do not experience them, feel them, or see such spiritual blessings. We too doubt or grow weak because of our human nature. But as God said to Abram, so God says to us, "Fear not Abram: I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward." God does not want His sheep to be fearful or afraid, for He is our Shield and our certain defense against the devil, the world, and our flesh. Our Good Shepherd will not permit any true harm to befall His sheep. His "exceeding great reward", is a reward of grace, namely Christ has earned our reward for us - not by any merit or worthiness of our own. Just as Abram was already a "father of many nations" because God had promised it so BEFORE Abram had any children, so forgiveness of sins and life everlasting is also ours NOW by way promise, even BEFORE we've reached our heavenly home. Because God's Word is true then, life everlasting begins on earth by way of God's promise the moment faith is kindled in the heart, but we do not see this promise fulfilled until we reach our heavenly home.

"And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?" Here Abram struggles with human reason. Perhaps the Lord meant to make a great nation from his servant Eliezer? Here in Abram we see what we have often experienced ourselves; doubt and disbelief. When we don't immediately get what we pray for, eventually we figure it is not the Lord's will and we stop praying for it. We too easily give up or even doubt God's gracious nature and we forget His many promises

regarding prayer. "Ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find". This is indeed a certain promise of God. "Call upon Me in the day of trouble, I WILL deliver Thee and thou shalt glorify me." When we pray we should also remember Isaiah 65:24. "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." While we cannot prescribe to God the time or manner in which God answers our prayers, faith must confidently rest upon God's gracious and giving nature. While we must ever keep in mind God does at times say "No", sometimes He makes us wait only to test our faith and confidence that eventually He will say "Yes". As Jacob wrestled with the Angel, as Abram petitioned the Lord several times in prayer, so we must persevere, even wrestle with the Lord in prayer. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not on thine own understanding."

"And, behold, the word of the LORD *came* unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir." One simple point here is that children are a gift from God. Psalm 127 says, "Children are the heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is His reward....Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them." Birth control is man's invention, and not God's natural order of things. It is the devil himself who does not want Christians to have children, but God says, "Be fruitful and multiply." In the case of Abram and Sarah, God had for a time given them a cross to bear. It grieved his heart being childless, but the Lord had His reasons. So all Christians should keep in mind that if God withholds certain blessings, it is for a good reason. But let us likewise not despair if we do not receive this blessing, "for unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given." Christ is the greatest blessing of all, and God's ways are higher than our own.

And God brought Abram "forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and He said unto him, So shall thy seed be." God here works through means. He gives Abram a visual lesson of His grace. Sometimes if you are far enough away from the lights of the city, you can see thousands of stars twinkling in the sky. What God was teaching Abraham here is this: his physical offspring, his descendants would be more numerous than the stars. Indeed Abraham was the physical father of the Jewish nation. He was given the honor of being the forefather of Christ. The Seed of Abraham is Christ. Galatians 3:16 says, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." This is also how God through Abraham blessed all nations. His Seed, which is Christ, died for the sins of the people, all nations. In Haggai 2:7 God says, "I will shake all nations, and the Desire of all Nations shall come." We desire this Desire of all Nations, when we desire Jesus to forgive our sins. For with desire He

desired to give His body and blood on the cross as a ransom for our sins of murder, adultery, and fornication. As God gave by the stars a visual lesson to Abraham of God's grace, so God gives to us the visible means of water in baptism, and the bread and wine in the Sacrament, that we might ever know and always be sure God's promises of forgiveness cannot fail. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."

Spiritually speaking then, what do these countless stars in the sky represent? They represent you, the believer, the Church, the Spiritual Israel, the spiritual offspring of Abraham. Galatians 3:7 says, "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham." We are spiritual descendants of Abraham by faith. Who can number, who can count all those whom the Lord has brought into His Church by the Gospel? As the Lord counted Abraham righteous by faith, so we are declared righteous by faith alone in Jesus Christ. "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." In the sight of God all believers are Jews, spiritual Jews, God's chosen people. "He is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." Rom. 2

Let us therefore give all thanks and praise to Jesus Christ, the Bright and Morning Star, who has shined His Light of Grace into our hearts so that we believe, trust, and know Him to be our Savior, for He has said, "Fear not Abram, I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." His reward is His righteousness. Amen.

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