

Talk for Sunday, April 19th 2020.

SERMON SERIES –READY TO RESPOND

God's call to Abraham & Gladys Aylward-Gen. 12: 1-5 & Matt. 1: 18-24

Today, we start our new series "Ready to Respond", when we shall look at 4 people in Scripture, whose lives were changed by God, &, in each case, consider the parallel with a more recent person's life story. Today it's the turn of Abraham & Gladys Aylward to reflect on the results of God's call to them.

Those of a certain age may recall a Persil advert "Before & After"-2 separate photos of a little girl walking along with one wearing an off white dress & the other a brilliant white one to make the point that the former was how she looked BEFORE her mother discovered Persil-the latter AFTER.. In the same way, we shall look at the HUGE contrast between Abram's familiar settled life in Ur or Haran & his unfamiliar pastoral, semi nomadic life after obeying God's call to move to Canaan. Likewise, there's the COLOSSAL difference between Gladys' familiar life as a parlour maid in 1930, before she followed God's call to serve in the totally unfamiliar set up of war torn China.

The contrast for Abram (his name then) was as follows. Life in Ur was civilized, settled & prosperous from trade-society was literate & the city secure from outside threats, whereas in Canaan he was an alien, he knew no one, he always had to be on the move to find pasture for his flocks, though he could have a more settled time near a town for awhile. Then there was always the danger of famine, hence a trip to Egypt once, or quarrels with fellow nomads over wells or the danger from marauding bands. This must have been more than a major mid-life crisis or career break! In Gen 12: 1 God recognizes the disruption Abram faced-the familiar things he would give up, he would leave "his country, his people & his father's household" a desperate rupture for a Middle Eastern family.

The cause of his move was that God told him to go to "a land that I will show you"- destination vague. As it says in Heb. 11: 8 "he obeyed & went, even though he did not know where he was going." In Gen. 12: 2-3, however, God gives 7 promises to Abram, which include making a great nation from him, making him a great God fearing character & making him a blessing to all nations. As Paul wrote in Rom. 4: 20 Abraham "staggered not at the promises of God."(AV)

Abram set off, fortified by these promises. He took with him Sarai, his wife, Lot his nephew, all his possessions accumulated over the years & the people acquired in Haran. He made slow progress towards Canaan. Indeed, he only owned one parcel of land there near Hebron, though he moved round from Shechem, where in Gen. 12: 7 God told him "to your offspring I will give this land", to Bethel to Beersheba to Gerer & so on.

What befell him during his wanderings? In a nutshell, after God's covenant or agreement of circumcision & the new name of Abraham, which followed a previous one Abraham, slowly, became a man of great faith, as God fulfilled his promise of their having a son against all the odds. This faith was tested to the limit on Mt. Moriah. Abraham saved Lot from destruction in Sodom in an answer to his prayer. He learnt how to defuse the quarrel with Abimelech over wells Gen. 20. Thus, in many ways, he became more of a man after God's own heart-in contrast to all around him he believed in ONE God who was almighty, eternal, righteous, just & merciful. In the future, the story line of Israel & Christianity goes back to him.

Gladys Aylward's story has much in common with Abraham's, when her origin is shown.

