

A Great Promise

At a recent Church Prayer Meeting, we were looking at a great promise God gave to Abram (just before he re-named him Abraham). It was a promise of '*greatly increased numbers*' – something every church longs to see. But we noticed there were two conditions attached to the fulfilment of this promise.

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers."
[Genesis 17.1-2]

⇒ Fellowship with God

Abraham was called to '*walk before the Lord*'. That phrase reminds us that life is like a journey, a pilgrimage in which we are called to walk in the constant companionship of Jesus (just like Cleopas and his companion did that the first Easter Sunday afternoon).

- **Genesis 3.8** tells us that God came to the Garden of Eden in the cool of the evening to walk with *Adam and Eve*, but found them hiding from him.
- **Genesis 5.24**, by contrast, speaks of *Enoch* who '*walked with God*' and was taken straight into heaven without experiencing death, as his reward for doing so.
- **Genesis 6.9** tells us of *Noah* courageously walking with God in the midst of the most corrupt society the world has ever known.

God's greatest blessings are experienced by those who chose to live their lives in constant fellowship with him.

Walking before the Lord means choosing his way, not ours. It means submitting ourselves to his directions rather than pursuing our own ideas. It means seeking to '*keep in step with the Spirit*' [Gal 6.25], rather than running ahead of him or lagging behind him. It means being willing to move ahead at the Lord's pace, not at our own preferred pace – whether that's faster or slower.

Anyone who runs ahead, and does not continue in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; but whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. [2 John 2.9]

There were times in his life prior to this promise when Abram had tried to take short cuts, with disastrous consequences (see Gen 12.13; 16.4). He now had to learn that God always knows best and is to be trusted at all times to take us in the right direction.

- In his second letter, John speaks of his *great joy* at discovering those who were *walking in the truth*, just as the Father commanded us (v4).
- He also speaks of those who were *walking in obedience* to his commands,
- especially the command to *walk in his love* (v6).

So, the first condition of fruitfulness is that we learn how to '*walk with the Lord in the light of his Word ... trusting and obeying*' day by day.

⇒ Holiness of character

Abram was also called to be *blameless*. The Hebrew word used here carries the idea of being 'complete' or 'fully integrated'. In other words, it's a call to be wholehearted in our commitment to Christ, not simply in our activities but in our attitudes as well.

The word 'holy' carries the idea of being 'separated', derived as it is from a root meaning 'to cut'. A holy person deliberately distances himself from all that he knows to be wrong, in order that he can be wholly dedicated to God.

There were occasions in Abram's past when he had been less than truthful (Gen 12.13); and times when he had followed unwise advice (Gen 16.4). So God was calling him here to renounce acts of compromise, in order to be wholly committed to God's way of doing things.

So we see that the second important condition of fruitfulness is that we live holy lives, not lives riddled with inconsistencies and compromises, as far as our practical commitment to Christ is concerned.

A Great Promise-Keeper

It is one thing to be given a great promise by God, and to understand the conditions we abide by for it to be fulfilled. But Abraham was puzzled as to *how* God would fulfil his promise, given the fact that both he and Sarah were old and childless.

Sometimes what God proposes seems impossible to us. We may even have a quiet chuckle to ourselves at the plans God sets before us, as both Abraham and Sarah did (Gen 17.17; 18.12).

But God had to remind Abraham and Sarah that with him, nothing is impossible!

Is anything too hard for the Lord?

[Genesis 18.14]

This is a verse we need to keep before us as we consider the finances required for our building refurbishment project in the coming months.

Refurbishment Progress

Last November, we commissioned Michael Drage, a local architect who specialises in church refurbishment work, to pull together all the pieces of the jigsaw we had collected and assemble them into a coherent picture, to enable us to see our way forward. This he has done, and we are now in receipt of his detailed reports.

I know I am speaking for all the deacons when I say how impressed we have all been by how quickly he has familiarised himself with the details of the project; how sensitive he has been to our financial constraints; how thorough and professional his approach has been; and how wise and practical his advice always is.

He has broken down the work needing to be done into six phases:

- *ensuring the water-tightness of the building;*
- *access ramps and accessible toilet facilities;*
- *conversion of meeting rooms into offices;*
- *refurbishment of halls and ladies toilets;*
- *the main church sanctuary;*
- *the church grounds.*

An outline costing has been provided for each of these phases. Michael Drage has recognised the need for the work to be phased, according to the finances available at any given time.

The agreed priorities are the access ramp and new toilet facilities, to enable us to comply with the Disability Access Act requirements for public buildings. Compliance will facilitate greater use of our building by community groups. Several potential users (both for sessional hire of our hall space, and longer-term rental of our office space) have been put off in the past by our lack of these kinds of facilities. The cost for this part of the work will be about £32,000.

The other top priority is much needed repair and improvement work on our roofs and rainwater goods (gutters and down pipes) to ensure the building is watertight. Without this work being attended to, deterioration of the fabric will set in very quickly. The cost of the urgent remedial roofing work has been put at around £10,000.

Adding in the cost of the initial survey (just over £3,000), we are looking to raise about £45,000 for this first phase of the work.

We have set aside £19,000 from our General Fund over the past few years for this work, so will be seeking to raise another £26,000 or so from external funders. We have so far received £2,500 from the first two grant-giving bodies we have approached, which is an encouraging start.

Please be much in prayer for this project in the coming months, claiming the promise that "*nothing is too hard for the Lord!*"

Food for Thought

⇒ On **Sunday mornings** over the coming months, we will be dipping into John's Gospel to discover ***what Jesus taught us about the Holy Spirit***. Pentecost will fall in the middle of the series, and we hope to mark the day with an all-age service.

⇒ On **Sunday evenings**, we will be picking out ***pearls of wisdom from the book of Proverbs***. The book of Proverbs is like the *Yellow Pages* telephone directory (except much more fun). It's a treasure trove of practical advice on almost every subject under the sun!

Plan to be fed consistently from God's Word, week in week out, so we can all grow in our fellowship with Christ and practical holiness.

David Hunt