

Being Ready to Depart

Matthew chapter 19 records the promise made to those who forsake the affairs of this life, for Christ's sake:

"... and every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life ..." (Mat. 19:29).

It is sometimes necessary to end our former associations for the Lord's sake, especially if they are unbelieving, belligerent, and pose a hindrance to our walk in Christ. The middle portion of today's readings describes those who would separate themselves to become part of the Bride of Christ:

"Hearken, O Daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house: So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him" (Psa. 45:10-11).

The allusion would appear to be from Genesis chapter 2:

"... therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh ..." (Gen. 2:24).

Although the reference here is directly to the man, it is evident (as we shall demonstrate) that the same principles apply to the woman also: both leave their natural families, and become joined together as one. We have many instances of this in Scripture, and we shall consider some of them by way of exhortation today.

REBEKAH

The record of Genesis 24 recounts the sending of Abraham's servant, to find a wife for his son Isaac, from his natural relatives in Mesopotamia. Abraham commanded his servant regarding the Divine supervision that he trusted in:

"he shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence. And if the woman will not be willing to follow thee, then thou shalt be clear from this my oath: only bring not my son thither again" (Gen. 24:7-8).

There were two factors involved with Isaac's prospective wife: 1. The Angel would arrange circumstances that would lead to a spouse being obtained, and 2. The woman had to be willing to leave her family, and go to be Isaac's wife. In the event, Rebekah proved to be very willing. After the servant had declared his mission, we read:

"they said, we will call the damsel, and enquire at her mouth. And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go" (Gen. 24:57-58).

Notice that there was no hesitation on her part: "she said, I will go". This was a great act of faith, as she didn't know Isaac, yet she was willing to leave behind her family her "own people", and her "father's house", to embrace, and become joined to the family of Abraham.

RACHEL AND LEAH

Through particular means, Jacob came to serve Laban for his two wives Rachel and Leah, and a flock of goats and sheep. Whilst he was with Laban, God blessed the household, and even Laban recognised this: "... I have learned by experience that Yahweh hath blessed me for thy sake" (Gen. 30:27). But

once Jacob purposed to leave, and return back to his homeland, his fortunes changed, and Jacob became quite wealthy, at Laban's expense. So the Angel of God appeared to him again in a dream:

“... I am the God of Beth-el, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowest a vow unto me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred” (Gen. 31:13).

But notice the response of both Rachel and Lea, once Jacob had related this dream to them - they were willing to leave their family, like Rebekah had done:

“... all the riches which God hath taken from our father, that is our's, and our children's; now then, **whatsoever God hath said unto thee, do**” (Gen. 31:16).

Notice their willingness to be part of the outworking of God's Purpose: “whatsoever God hath said unto thee, do”! They recognised that their prosperity was of God, and were willing to leave their “own people” and their “fathers' house” behind, and depart with their husband, to lead a nomadic life with him, dwelling in tents.

RUTH

The Divine record describes the providential circumstances of how Ruth, a Moabitess, came to be joined to Israel. Those circumstances are beyond the scope of our present considerations, but are described in this article: <https://bibleonline.uk/archives/21314>. Ruth is another example of one who was willing to leave all behind, and become part of the family of Naomi – by contrast to Orpah her sister, who returned back to her people and her gods:

“Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: Yahweh do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me” (Ruth 1:16-17).

Notice that she was also willing to leave her people – and her gods - behind, to be joined to Naomi, her people, and Yahweh her God. Even so, she became a mother in the genealogy of Christ, being joined to Boaz, Naomi's kinsman, and son of Rahab the repentant harlot. She provides a wonderful example of how when in Israel, there was great apostasy and every man did that which was right in his own sight, a Gentile embraced their national hope, to worship their God in spirit and in truth.

ABRAHAM

When considering examples of those who left all behind, we would be very remiss not to mention Abraham:

“by faith, Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed, and he went out, not knowing whither he went.” (Heb. 11:8).

But the Divine record also describes how Abraham lived out the spirit of a stranger and sojourner, and demonstrated that by living in tents:

“By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise” (Heb. 11:9).

Abraham forsook all, “not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off”, being “persuaded of them, and embraced them”, and confessed that he was a stranger and pilgrim in the land (Heb. 11:13). Again, a wonderful example for us to follow!

LOT

Having departed from Abraham, Lot went to life in an area of natural prosperity – yet was spiritually bereft. He lived in Sodom, and was greatly distressed at the godlessness of that society. So we read that God:

“delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing an hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;), the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished ...” (2 Pet. 2:8-9).

Lot was called upon to leave that city, in order for the judgements of God to begin: “... Up, get you out of this place; for Yahweh will destroy this city” (Gen. 19:15). He lingered to begin with: “and while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters: Yahweh being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city” (Gen. 19:16).

However, his wife looked back: “his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt” (Gen. 19:26). Here, the Hebrew for “looked back” signifies, “to look intently, to regard with pleasure.” Evidently, it wasn’t a casual glance, it was a longing to return to that place. Hence the Master warned of the coming day of judgment: “in that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot’s wife ...” (Lu. 17:31). The juxtaposition of returning back with remembering Lot’s wife reveals her true feelings. Whilst Lot left without so much as a backward glance, she gazed intently, being reluctant to leave her hometown.

There is parallel with our circumstance. Like Lot, we have been “delivered from the wrath to come” (1 Thes. 1:10): we must, therefore, be willing to leave the Sodomitic society in which we sojourn behind, with no regrets, and without looking back. Our souls are sore vexed with the excesses of wickedness all around us: the faithful will be glad to leave it all behind, and become joined as an ecclesial Bride to the Lord Jesus Christ.

MOSES

The occasion of Israel leaving Egypt to go to the land promised to their fathers, is one of the most well known of Bible stories. The parting of the Red Sea, which facilitated their final cutting off of Egypt, is one of the most well known of Bible miracles. This immediately followed the institution of the Passover feast, where the people were to eat their food in haste, dressed for immediate departure:

“... and thus shall ye eat it; ***with your loins girded***, your shoes upon your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste, it is Yahweh’s Passover” (Exo. 12:11).

In a similar way, those who embrace the hope of Israel must also be prepared for an immediate departure:

“wherefore, ***gird up the loins of your mind***, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:3).

But we have another example in the case of Moses himself:

“By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward. By faith, he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible” (Heb. 11:24-27).

Moses “forsook Egypt”, and spent 80 years of his life wandering in the wilderness with the people of God. “Through faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood” (vs. 28), trusting in the promises of the Lord. In some ways, his situation was like Lot in Sodom: the judgments of God were to be poured out upon the society in which they lived, and these men of faith were delivered from the coming wrath. They left their homes behind, forsaking the temporal pleasures of living in a materially prosperous society, to suffer for the Truth’s sake.

OUR OWN POSITION

God has: “appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead” (Acts 17:31), and that is a “day” we must prepare for. The Apostolic command is to separate ourselves from the ways of the flesh, just like the examples before us.

“wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you” (2 Cor. 6:17).

In the coming day of judgment, we need to be ready to leave everything behind. The Lord shall come to take us to himself: “... the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught away together with them in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. And so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thes. 4:17).

We need, therefore, to be ready to be “caught away” – like Philip was (Acts 8:39), to the Lord, and so be hidden in the day of Yahweh’s anger:

“come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. For behold, Yahweh cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity ...” (Isa. 26:20-21).

We have considered the example of faithful men and women of old, who were willing and ready to depart in order to embrace the holy seed of Abraham, and their national Hope. We need to be ready for the Angel, like Rebekah: “I will go”! We must remember Lot’s wife, and be prepared to leave everything behind, without so much as a backward glance, let alone an intense gaze!

We do not know the day nor the hour when we shall be called, and we have “no need” to know, for “yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night ...” (1 Thes. 5:1-2). We know as a matter of first principle doctrine, that the Lord will come again. But are we ready to leave the world in which we live at an instant? “for God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thes. 5:9). Are we really those who “love his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8)? Or would our preference be for that day to be afar off so that we can enjoy the pleasures of sin for a prolonged season? We must consider these questions soberly, for our answer will determine our future destiny.

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