

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

ABRAHAM'S TRIAL: A LESSON FOR BELIEVERS.

A Sermon

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DELIVERED BY

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"And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am."—Genesis xxii. 1.

We may regard the father of the faithful as being a pattern of his children. As God dealt with Abraham, so will he deal in measure with all those who, as believers, are the children of believing Abraham. Everything that will abide the fire shall go through the fire, that it may be both proved and improved. We clearly understand that when God is said to "tempt" Abraham, the word used does not carry its ordinary meaning. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." But Jehovah is accustomed to *try* and *test* his people; and this is what we are here to understand. The Revised Version renders the words, "God did *prove* Abraham," and, as I have said, God works by the same method with all his saints.

Of course, we shall not all attain to the same stature that Abraham reached, neither shall we all be tried by the same tests that were applied to him; but every one of us shall be tested, like Abraham, if indeed we are believers in God. He was the Columbus who, by faith, went out, and discovered a better country, that is, a heavenly; and his track has been followed by many other voyagers. Not without storms did he cross the sea, and we, too, who venture after him on the voyage of faith, must expect to meet with contrary winds, and waves sweeping high. We may look for a considerable measure of conformity in our lives to the life of the great patriarch; and we must not be astonished, as though some strange thing had happened to us, if great and severe tests should be put upon us before the chapter of life is over.

None of us ought to object to this. Shall the child of faith be otherwise than the father of the faithful? I may say of Abraham

what our Lord said of himself: "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord." Shall the believer, saved and justified by faith, as Abraham was, rebel against sharing in Abraham's lot? We shall sit down by-and-by at the same table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of our God; surely we may be content to fare on the road as they fared. In fact, I hope you will say concerning Abraham, "Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." We are willing to take the portion of the righteous. We will not say, with wretched Balaam, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" We would have a far better desire than that: "May my way be the way of the righteous, that my end may be like his! May I have a portion with thy people, O God: and do thou deal with me as thou dost with all those that love thy name!"

Let us look at our text. It is a kind of preface to this unique, this unparalleled story of Abraham's test. First, "It came to pass after these things, that God did tempt (or "prove") Abraham"—here we see *the Lord's way with believers*. And, secondly, when God "said unto him, Abraham," the patriarch instantly answered, "Behold, here I am,"—here we learn *the believer's way with the Lord*. These two heads will not be difficult to remember: the Lord's way with believers, and the believer's way with the Lord.

I. First, THE LORD'S WAY WITH BELIEVERS. He dealeth with his own people as he doth not with the world. To be loved by God with the love he bears to his chosen, is a wonderful honour; but it carries with it the Father's authority; and "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." All disciples are subject to this blessed discipline.

First of all, then, let us notice that *God does deal with his people*, he is never far away from them; he leaves them not to themselves, but is ever nigh those who are truly his. God did test Abraham. It is a great thing that God should take any notice of us, poor creatures that we are. "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" Job wondered that God dealt with him in the way of affliction, for he says, "Am I a sea, or a whale, that thou settest a watch over me?" We are so insignificant that it is a great wonder that God should come to deal with us at all. If you saw some tall archangel, whose wand might make a mast for some great man-of-war, bending down over an ant's nest, or talking with an emmet, you might wonder at his stoop; but this would be nothing compared with the infinite God, the Maker of all things, condescending to deal with us worms of the earth. Yet he does so. We are precious in his sight; therefore, as the goldsmith assays the metal, as the silversmith refines the silver again and again in a furnace of earth, so doth God test, purify, and try us: he sets a high value upon us, and therefore he tests us. O child of God, be glad that God comes near you! I would sooner feel his hand heavy upon me than be forgotten of him. I would rather see his face wreathed in frowns than never see him at all.

Oh, what an awful thing it will be for those who will be cast away from him! To hear him say, "Depart," will be like an infinity of wretchedness; but if he even calls us to him that he may chasten us, his voice has music in it. Lord, blessed be thy name, thou thinkest upon thy servants! Thou thinkest upon them even when thou dost chasten them, and when thou dost test them; for this we would bless thy holy name.

Notice, next, that God not only deals with believers very intimately, but *he tests them*. "God did tempt Abraham." "God did prove Abraham." Abraham was a man whose life gave good evidence of his faith in Jehovah; but the Lord is a jealous God, and he loves to have still more evidence of the fidelity of his people. He hungers after clear proofs from them that they really are his; and he works in them by his grace until he casts out all other loves, and all other confidences, that he may have the whole of their hearts, and that they may love him and trust him supremely.

Some of you have nothing to do with my text to-night. God does not test you, because he knows very well what you are, and he knows that you are not precious metal. The spurious coin is nailed down on the counter, or cast into the fire; and they that are not true people of God, and have none of the silver of grace in them, will come to such an end one day, and be, with shame and everlasting contempt, nailed down on the counter as counterfeits, or thrown into the fire that never shall be quenched. "Reprobate silver shall men call them, because the Lord hath rejected them." It is the true coin that we try and test; and God, because he loved Abraham, and valued him, and saw his grace in him, tested him.

He tested, first of all, his fear of God. That was the main point, as you will see in the twelfth verse: "Now I know that thou fearest God." The Lord delights in a man who has a holy reverence for his God. I do not hesitate to say that this is a very scarce article nowadays. When I hear of one saying that he has received "a straight tip" from God, I feel that a man capable of speaking in such a manner was never spoken to by the Infinite Jehovah. Communion with God bows a man to the dust, and causes him to use lowly and reverent language. No; God never comes near to us, and then leaves us in a frame of mind in which we could speak flippantly or irreverently of him. When I hear professing Christians arraigning God's conduct, and setting up to criticize God's Word, I stand in doubt of them. O sirs, God's true children tremble at his Word; they never question him! "Why dost thou strive against him? for he giveth not account of any of his matters." "Who art thou that repliest against God?" The spirit of criticism is alien altogether to the spirit of the child of God. It is not what they say in their criticism that I care about. It is the spirit that dares to say it, that is the evil thing. The Lord will try each one of us whether we really fear him or not, and if the test be not so severe as that which Abraham was called to endure, still the test will come. If we say, "No, I cannot do that; I am afraid of the consequences," that shows that we do not fear God enough; for the man who fears God fears nothing else. The path of duty made clear, he says, "I must do it, cost what it may; for it would be infinitely

more costly not to do it." His fear of God ejects all fear of men, and all fear of consequences; it is the backbone of all real holiness, and all true godliness. And God tries us to see whether we have this holy awe of him, and leads us to follow in the steps of Abraham his friend.

God also tried Abraham's faith. Could he believe that God was right when he commanded him to slay his son? All the promises were wrapped up in Isaac. If Isaac dies, how can Abraham have a seed? He had been told, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called," not in Ishmael. What, then, if Isaac shall die? All hope of a seed must pass away. How can it be? But it was not with Abraham any matter of question. "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief." You know what a man does when he staggers. Perhaps he does not go quite down, but he can hardly keep his feet. Abraham was never in that condition. He believed God, and therefore he stood firm. His faith was able to face difficulties, and to surmount them. When the promise of the birth of Isaac was given, we read that, "being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead." This was, indeed, a triumph of trust; but he went further than that. The Revised Version shows that he fully faced the difficulty, and yet believed as much as ever. "Without being weakened in faith he considered his own body now as good as dead." The faith that was undismayed when the promise of a son was uttered was still undaunted when the Lord demanded the life that he had so strangely given. Perhaps God gave it such a supreme test because of its very grandeur. The trial was terrible; but still Abraham believed. Possibly, he did not understand the trial; he did not want to understand. He believed, and he took God at his word, and he would do what God bade him do, whatever that might be, and he would leave the Lord to extricate him out of any difficulties into which his obedience might bring him. Thus God tried his faith.

Above all, God tried Abraham's love. It may be that Isaac, though a gift from God, began to usurp God's place. An Isaac may become an idol. The dearest thing we have, the most precious, the most beloved, may still become an abomination, by being made an idol to keep us away from God. Some of the heathen worship gods of mud, others worship gods of gold; but there is no difference in the idolatry, whether the image be made of mire or of the most precious metal. Have you any idols, dear friends? I will not press the question too closely; but whatever your idols may be, they will bring you a world of trouble, for you must love nothing in comparison with God. He must be first, and everything else far away in the background. No rivals will he endure. He will permit no Dagon to stand in the place where the ark of the covenant abides. So God tests Abraham to see which has most of his heart's love, Jehovah who gave him Isaac, or Isaac whom Jehovah asked from him back again.

Thus God deals with believers, and tests them.

But the next point here is that, in some cases, *God himself tests believers*. "It came to pass after these things, that God"—"Elohim," that is the word—"Elohim did tempt Abraham." This does not always occur. Job is tried by the devil, and the devil tests him, though even

then God is there permitting the devil to be his instrument. But God himself was here, himself testing his servant Abraham. I never read that he tested Lot. Poor Lot! He was a poor "lot", indeed. There was just enough grace in him to keep him alive, and no more; but he could not stand any tests. Lot failed wretchedly in Sodom. He was a righteous man, and proved that he was so by being grieved with the filthy conversation of those round about him; but still God did not test him. There was not enough true metal in him for God to try him; he left the Sodomites to do that. They were quite good enough to test Lot; but Abraham was a man of very different metal; or, at least, there was a much larger percentage of gold in Abraham than was to be found in Lot. Therefore God did test Abraham. O friends, there is something here to think of! Here is a peculiar character whom God himself deals with. Here is a special honour put upon the servant when Elohim himself doth test Abraham. Have you never prayed, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting"? Invite divine inspection, and, if God shall come, and by some extraordinary trial test you, be not cast down on that account, but rather take it as a very choice favour that the King himself should put you to the proof to know whether you are indeed his.

Further, I want you to notice that, in God's dealings with believers, *he tests them again and again*. Read the text through, "It came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham." After all his life of holy obedience he was still not free from trials. God still tested him. He had received great and precious promises, more than any other man of his time; and he believed them, and sucked the sweetness out of them; but after these things God did try Abraham. He had had rare enjoyments. Did not angels come and sit at his table? Did not the great Melchizedek himself come forth with bread and wine to feast him? But after these things God did test Abraham. He had been tested before. He had quitted his country; he had sent away Ishmael, whom he loved, when the command came, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son." He had been tested; but, after all, he must still be tested. These things are an example to all the people of God. We are not yet out of the wilderness, and we may, even at the very last, have our highest test yet to come. "After these things, God did tempt Abraham." Abraham had reached a very high point of faith, and after a time he had enjoyed great quiet of spirit. Everything went well with him. By faith he had fought four kings, and led captivity captive. By faith he had trampled on the riches of the world, and told the king of Sodom that he would "not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet" of him. By faith he had become great with God, and God had put part of his own name into Abram's name, and made him Abraham, blending the name of God with the name of his servant; and yet God did test Abraham; not Abram only, but even Abraham.

Note here, that God did not try Abraham like this at the beginning. It is "after these things" God tried Abraham. There was a course of education to prepare him for this great testing time; and the Lord knows how to educate you up to such a point that you can endure

in years to come what you could not endure to-day; just as to-day he may make you to stand firm under a burden, which, ten years ago, would have crushed you into the dust. After all the tuition that God had given to him, after close communion with God, receiving the Spirit of God into his soul in rich abundance; "after these things" God did test Abraham.

And here I go further, and say, that *God tests his people by actual experience*. He did not test Abraham by words only; he did not say to him, "Will you do this? Are you willing to do that?" It is always easy to say that we will do a thing if we do not expect to be compelled to do it. We can make large promises when we think we shall never be called upon to fulfil them; we can even think large things to-day about what we intend to do to-morrow. It is always easy to rise up early overnight. But God does not prove his people in word only, but in deed and in truth. The plain command came to Abraham, which must be at once obeyed. He must go into the land of Moriah; and he must offer his son there for a burnt-offering. It must come to real action. How big you and I are in words! How great some people are in profession! "Oh!" they say, "we will never fail our Lord;" like Peter, they assert that, "Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will we never be offended." They become bold in their boasting, and proud in their own conceit; "professing themselves to be wise, they become as fools." They may even turn the very grace of God, which has enriched them, into an occasion of vain glory. "I am perfect," says one, "and completely dead to the world; henceforth there is no fear that I shall fall. In time of trial I shall be strong, and if only the martyr times were back again, how gloriously would I testify for God!" But, after all, it is the test of real life, the test of actual experience, that will show what a man is. When God comes to real filing and hammering, and puts us into the crucible, then it is that he proves how much is dross, and how much is true metal.

Some believers are *tested more thoroughly than others*. In this case, the Lord tried Abraham most severely. I cannot imagine a greater test than that which the Lord applied to Abraham. The Jews usually say that Abraham was tried ten times. Surely on this occasion he was tried ten times in one. Here you have trial carried to the tenth degree. Here the furnace is made ten times hotter than it was wont to be heated. There was no other in the whole universe that ever, by divine command, offered up his only son, save One, and that One was he who commanded this sacrifice, and who consummated such a sacrifice himself; for he will never ask of us what he will not himself do. He gave freely for us his Only-begotten Son; and Abraham stands alone, the only one of woman born, that in this was called to be a close imitator of his God. God tried him because he could bear it. He tried him in this way, because of him it was said, he was the friend of God: he was the father of the believing family; and, because of his high position, he must have the very greatest of troubles, trials, and tests.

My last thought, under this head, shall be, that if God does thus try believers, *he blesses them greatly thereby*. All this testing was meant to

be a great blessing to Abraham. Do I see you start back? Do you seem to say that I have used terrible language in speaking thus about God's testing his people? Oh, but, beloved, the tests and trials of God's servants, though they rumble a little in our ears, as did the waggons that Joseph sent from Egypt to fetch Jacob, bring blessings to us. Those waggons came to take Jacob down to a land where he should behold the face of his beloved, and should be with him all his life; and our trials come to prepare us for the glorious meeting with our Lord. God sends us letters in black-edged envelopes, but they are all love-letters; and the blacker the letters look outside, the brighter they are inside. The Lord paints the galleons of his grace with dark colours, and we dream that they bear us evil; but they are loaded down to the water's brim with gold, and rare and precious things. Wherefore, be confident, tried believers.

"Trials make the promise sweet,
Trials give new life to prayer;
Trials bring me to his feet,
Lay me low, and keep me there."

The first blessed effect of God's test of Abraham was that thus he avoided evil. This trial prevented him from thinking too much of Isaac, and allowing Isaac to divide him from his God. Perhaps he was in danger of falling into that sin, and God saw it, and he sent this test in order to put Isaac into his right place, that Isaac might not die. He would have Abraham offer him up, that he might keep him. He would have him offer him up to God, that he might receive him back; for he was not Abraham's son in a spiritual sense, till that day. Isaac was his son after the flesh, but, when he received him back again by faith, he became his son in the new covenant of grace, one of the seed of Abraham after the Spirit. He received his son that day in the highest sense from God.

Do you not think, also, that it did Abraham great good in assuring his own heart, and enabling him to know, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that he really did fear and love God? Some of you get doubting whether you really do fear God. Would it not be worth while to pass through some tremendous trouble, to get that settled once for all? I do think that the Lord gives some of his people full-assuring tribulations, so that when once these are past, all doubting and fearing are at an end. I spoke to a child of God, the other day, who said, "I do not know that, for twenty years, I have had the slightest hesitation in saying that I know whom I have believed; but," he said, "I had an awful fight just before that time." It is good to kill the lion and have done with him, and then go and find honey in his carcase. It is an ordinary lion, however, that only wants killing once; for some lions I have met with have been killed a good many times, but they seem to come to life again very quickly. This test, however, Abraham needed only once, and after that, since God himself said, "Now I know that thou fearest God," he doubtless enabled Abraham to say, "Now I know that I fear God."

The trial blessed him further in revealing Christ. Do you not think that, on this occasion, Abraham had a clearer view of Christ than ever he had before? Our Saviour says, "Abraham rejoiced to

see my day: and he saw it, and was glad." When did Abraham see Christ? He may have seen him at other times; but on the top of Moriah, when his own son was on the wood, and his own hand was lifted up, he must have seen the Son of God, and the uplifted hand of God offering the Great Sacrifice. When he took the ram from the thicket, and so saved the life of his son, how clearly he must have understood that blessed doctrine of substitution, which is the very centre of the gospel! I have no other hope than this. Nor can I conceive anything else that would be good news to me but the fact "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures;" that there was offered another life instead of mine, through which I live. By a life I do not live, and by a death I do not die, I am saved. So it was with Isaac when he was saved by the ram taken in the thicket. It was worth while for Abraham thus to be tested to have a view of Christ.

And, lastly, Abraham was blessed by the test in communing with the Father. To this day, perhaps, Abraham enters more into the heart of God than any other man in heaven. I will not speculate; but it seems to me that none of us can ever know such fellowship with the great Father as Abraham has known, now these thousands of years; for when he thinks of the great Father, who surrendered his Son for the salvation of men, he humbly adores the infinite mind; but he seems to say, "And I, too, was helped in my little way, as small things may be compared with great, to stand and offer up my son as a burnt-offering unto the Most High." I think that he is still the father of the faithful. I think that Abraham still holds wonderful pre-eminence. I do not wonder that we read of being in Abraham's bosom: to get as near to Abraham as ever we can is one of the things to be desired, that we may have sympathy and fellowship with the eternal Father for ever.

I notice that some of the old translators render the passage, "It came to pass, after these things that God did lift up Abraham." It is a strange translation, and probably inaccurate; but it is wonderfully true, for all that; for God did lift up Abraham to a higher platform altogether, and brought him into a greater nearness to himself, than he could have known in any other way.

So far, I have occupied your mind on a grand subject, the Lord's way with believers.

II. My second subject is a very practical one. THE BELIEVER'S WAY WITH THE LORD; for if God has dealings with the believer, the believer also has intercourse with the Lord.

It takes two to make communion and fellowship. Is it not a wonderful thing that men can thus meet God, and commune with him face to face? This is the glory of faith, for "he that cometh to God must believe that he is." This is not an arbitrary condition, but arises from the nature of things. Just as in a map of the two hemispheres, the circles only touch, and only can touch at one point, so God can only meet men by faith. Thus, to be a believer in God is to have a faculty whereby we can touch the Eternal. It is not enough, however, merely to know God as the Creator. "Ye believe in God, believe also in me," saith the Lord Jesus; "no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Better be a believer in Christ than have all the wealth of the Indies

rolled to your feet, and all the thrones of the world at your disposal ; for you then possess the unsearchable riches of Christ, and will one day share his throne of glory. Oh, that all who now hear my words were indeed amongst those who believe ! Why should you not venture at this moment to launch out on the ocean of divine truth ? It is no venture, for a believer in Christ is one who cannot be lost. God deals with those who believe as he dealt with Abraham ; and only those who believe can have dealings with him. How, then, does the believer act towards God ? Let us look at the case before us.

God said to the patriarch, "Abraham," and he said, "Behold, here I am." When God speaks to the believer, he, on his part, is *honoured by the call*. Have you never heard God speak to you ? I do not mean that with these ears you have heard any audible voice ; but has he not spoken to your heart in such a way that, if there were no other men alive, God could not have spoken more pointedly and definitely to you ? God called Abraham alone. It is the way with him to say, "Samuel, Samuel." It is the way with him to call, "Saul, Saul." "I have called thee by thy name ; thou art mine." "He calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out." What greater honour can we have than this ? The King knows our name, and addresses us. In a law court, one day, a man who was quite at the back began to struggle, and press his way forward, and the people angrily told him to be quiet. "Did you not hear ?" he said ; "I am called." Instantly they opened a way for him to the front, and admired his prompt action. How much readier we should be to reply to the voice of God, recognizing the privilege and honour thus bestowed upon us ! Have you not had such a call, and responded to it ?

Next, the believer shows himself *ready to be taught*. As soon as God said, "Abraham," he answered, "Here am I." He seemed to say, "Here I am, Lord ; all attention. Master, say on. Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." Are you always in that condition, ready to be taught of God ? Is his word precious to you ? Is his Holy Spirit greatly revered by you, so that, the moment you hear him call, you wait to hear what God the Lord will speak to you, knowing that "he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints" ? Happy is the man who is thus ready to be taught.

Moreover, the believer must be *ready to obey* as well as ready to be taught. He must be willing to say, "Here I stand, as thy servant. I know not what the orders are going to be, but here am I. Send me whither thou wilt, with what burden thou wilt, as long as thou wilt. Here am I." If you are not willing to obey, you may be quite sure you are not a believer, for obedience is the natural outcome of belief. You remember the last verse of the third of John—"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life ;" and then immediately another word is used which bears a stronger sense, and may be rendered, "He that *obeyeth* not the Son shall not see life." For, truly, if we believe on Christ, we shall also obey him. Are you, dear friend, willing to say to God, "Here am I ; send me : let me be actively engaged in thy service ; or, if it please thee better, bid me go up to my bed, and lie there, and suffer sickness and pain. I am ready to obey, just as thou wilt" ? Abraham was ready to be taught, and ready to obey.

And, more than that, the believer will be equally *ready to surrender*. "Abraham." "Here am I." He does not know what God is going to ask of him. It may be Sarah. It may be Isaac. I dare say that Isaac was the last person that he expected would be asked of him, seeing that all his hopes were bound up in him, and he was the child of promise. God often does the unexpected with his servants. However, there was no reserve about it. Abraham said, "Here am I."

" Yea, shouldst thou take them all away,
Yet will I not repine ;
Before they were possessed by me
They were entirely thine."

And they are entirely thine still. Oh, what a glorious state of mind—to be ready to learn, ready to obey, and ready to surrender !

And Abraham was also *ready to be inspected*. He says, "Here am I." Adam went and hid himself in the garden, and God had to call after him, "Where art thou?" Abraham was ready when God called him." It will be well if you can say, when you kneel at your bedside to-night, "Lord, I have nothing to conceal. I am sincere before thee. I would have thee acquainted with all my faults and sins, that thou mayest wash them away ; I would have thee know all my mistakes and errors, that thou mayest correct them all. Thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee. I am no hypocrite. I have made no pretence of being thy servant while I have been serving self and sin." O blessed man, that dares to open his bosom, to lay bare his very heart, and say, "Shine into me, O Lord, and let thy searching light go through and through me ; for in truth I am thy servant !"

The believer who is prepared to respond to the Lord in such a way, has much cause to praise, for *he has been made ready by the grace of God*. Abraham could not have said, "Here am I," with all this promptness, if it had not been for the education of grace that had brought him up to it. Beloved, you may think yourself ready for any service or any trial ; but you are not, unless grace has done great things for you. Then every act performed by grace becomes, through grace, an apprenticeship for a greater one.

For God's sake, Abraham had left his country and his father's house. Have you come out from the world ? If you have not, you cannot say, "Here am I." Poor soul, still siding with the world, you are where you ought not to be ! "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing ; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." Abraham had boldly obeyed God's command, and separated himself from his old companions.

Next, Abraham had yielded to Lot. He let him take his choice of the best part of the land, even the well-watered plain of Sodom. He had not disputed with him. Are you willing to let the worldling have the best of it here below, and to take your portion by-and-by in the promised land ? If not, you cannot say, "Here am I," because you will probably be up to your neck in worldliness, and as greedy after gain as anybody else is. You are taking your portion

among the men of Sodom and Gomorrah, and how can you say, "Here am I"? Lot could not have said it; but Abraham could.

Moreover, Abraham had defied foes. Four kings came into the country, and he had only a handful of servants and friends, yet he went after them like a flash of lightning, and smote the four kings. Well, now, if you are a cowardly fellow, and have never dared to "Stand up, stand up for Jesus," you cannot say, "Here am I." Where are you? Hiding away, trying to save your precious skin, and to avoid being laughed at for Christ? You will not be ready for the Lord's call till you come out, and "fight the good fight of faith."

But God had trained his servant Abraham to do yet more. He had despised the world when he told the king of Sodom that he would not take anything of his, "from a thread even to a shoelatchet." And now he can say, "Here am I." Until we get free from all worldly entanglements, and cease, even in the least thing, to rely on an arm of flesh, or to resort to worldly expedients, we shall not be prepared instantly to respond to the call of God.

Abraham had gone even further. He had cast out the bondwoman and her son, and now he could say, "Here am I." As long as you hold on to legalism, and trust in your own good works, you dare not rise to meet God, for you are under the law, and not under grace. But when that is all gone, you can say, "Here am I, in the covenant of grace, standing in Christ Jesus, ready for anything."

Again, Abraham had prevailed with God in prayer. You remember how he had pleaded for the wicked cities of the plain, and God had allowed him to continue his intercessions with great boldness. O beloved, you cannot say, "Here am I," if God has never known you as a suppliant at his throne of grace! Sometimes I have said to myself, "The Lord Jesus Christ can never say to me at the last, 'I never knew you: depart from me,' for he has known me as I know a poor man in the street who has begged of me every day." I am always begging of my Lord, clamouring at him for one thing or another. He knows me well enough. Why, when I was but a youth, I trusted him for my eternal salvation! He called me to himself, and blessed me. I know that he will never be able to say to me, "I never knew you." Beloved, this is why Abraham was so quick in responding to God's call, because he was God's friend, who was on such intimate terms with his Lord that he could intercede with him on the behalf of guilty men.

My last thought is most precious. Since the believer is thus prepared by grace to respond to the Lord's call, as Abraham did, when he said, "Here am I," *he will be kept ready to the end.* My great desire is, that you and I should be ready for anything that the Lord wills, and keep always ready for it, so that if Christ should come at cock-crowing, or should come at midday, or midnight, we should be ready; and if death should come, we should be ready; and if we should lose our dearest friend, our choicest treasure, our health—anything or everything—yet still we should each one say, "Lord, I never made any bargain with thee. I never had anything reserved from thee. If it is thy will, it is my will. If thou sayest it, so be it; for who am I, and what is thy servant, that I should dare to dispute

with the infinite wisdom of infallible love?" Happy is the man who can say, "Here am I." The Lord put you into that frame of mind; and then it shall be said of you, "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord." You shall go merrily through life, and joyfully to death, and you shall rise triumphantly in the glad morning; for when God shall call you, then you will each one answer, "Here am I; for thou didst call me."

"From beds of dust, and silent clay,"

we shall arise with songs in our mouths to answer to the resurrection trumpet, and so shall we be for ever with the Lord. Thus shall all the children of faith be blessed with faithful Abraham.

God bless these words to you, dear friends, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—GENESIS xxii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—208, 750, 703.

The following letter, written by MR. SPURGEON to the congregation at the Tabernacle last Lord's-day, will give the latest information as to his progress towards recovery:—

"Westwood, Beulah Hill, Upper Norwood,
"Sept. 20, 1891.

"BELOVED FRIENDS,—May this Sabbath be a high day with you! May this be a day wherein the Good Shepherd shall find his lost sheep, and lay them on his shoulders rejoicing! Mr. Fullerton, whom I greatly love in the Lord, has won many souls abroad; may he again have many gracious captives among us at home!

"I would not write of myself, only you want to know, and you desire to know all that I can tell. I am sitting up this morning to write you before the doctor comes at 8.30, and so I cannot tell what he will say of me. The affectionate and effectual prayers of the saints dragged me back to life, and only by the same means shall I recover strength. I will not touch upon my present affliction; you will guess at it when I say that, although the stairs to my bed-chamber are very easy, I cannot ascend them, but have to be carried up by others. The heart as yet will not endure even that small climb, therefore I need your prayers still; and I know I shall have them, for your love never ceases.

"You have kept together most lovingly during the four months now nearly over; can you abide my further absence, which is painful to me, and yet absolutely needed? The Lord grant it, I shall come among you fit for service, but it cannot be for months. The Lord does not give half-mercies. He will perfect that which concerneth us. How he has heard prayer! Had I died, all infidelity would have noted it as a proof that prayer was useless: we have a right now to score one on the other side. You would have been much discouraged if prayer had not been answered; and it is fair that now you should be equally encouraged and established in your confidence in the prayer-hearing Jehovah. The Lord bless every one of you! Let our love continue in all patience of hope.

"Yours ever heartily,

"C. H. SPURGEON."