

“Success with your faith is never final; failure with your faith is never fatal; it is courage with your faith that counts.”

This is definitely what we have been seeing in the life of Abraham... the “Father of our Faith”... in our study through Genesis. Abram showed a great deal of faith when he left Ur of Chaldees... to go to a place that God promised to show him. Once he arrived... God revealed that the land would be his... and his descendants. Abram set-up alters and proclaimed the character of God among the godless Canaanites. ... That is what successful faith looks like. But success is never final. Testing of our faith will always come.

A famine came... and it challenged Abram’s faith... that Canaan was where God really wanted him. He fled to Egypt... where he suffered more than one lapse of faith... even lying about Sarai... his wife. This was a time of great failure in Abram’s faith. But for the believer... failure is never fatal. God restored Abram... Abram returned to the land where God wanted him... and in last week’s passage we saw his faith continue to grow.

This morning we will see the third part to this axiom: “Success with your faith is never final; failure with your faith is never fatal; it is courage with your faith that counts.” Courage is what separates success from failure. You will not experiences any success with your faith... unless courage is present with it.

The purpose of our passage this morning... is to show that the courage of Abram... is essential to **our** faith. ... Believers are constantly facing the struggles of life... and attempting great things for God. ... As we do... we need the same kind of courageous faith that Abram had.

(Listen)... What good is your faith... if there is no courage? Your friends and family may know that you are a Cristian. ... And they might assume that you have faith. But do they see any evidence of courage in that faith? ... Do you live cautiously or courageously for Christ? (MAKE NO MISTAKE)... Without courage you are a spiritual ***nothing***. You are not pleasing to God. ... So let's learn from Abram this morning... what a courageous faith looks like. ... And keep in mind: "Success with your faith is never final; failure with your faith is never fatal; it is courage with your faith that counts."

Genesis 14:1-8

Abram is about to become involved a major war... where his faith will have him spring into courageous action. The opening verses of Genesis chapter 14 are setting the scene for us... to understand Abram's act of faith.

In Abram's time... most cities had their own kings. Wars and rivalries among kings were common. A conquered city paid tribute to the victorious king.

Apparently Kedorlaomoer was quite powerful. Five cities including Sodom had paid tribute to him for 12 years. ... The five cities formed an alliance and rebelled by withholding tribute. ... Kedorlaomer reacted swiftly to teach them all a lesson they would never forget.

Most of the events that we read about in the Bible take place on the West side of Israel's Jordan River... and the Dead Sea. That is where Jerusalem... Bethlehem... and Galilee are all located. The Trans-Jordan (the other side of the Jordan River)... is where the events of today's passage begin. It is where Lot located... after he separated from Abram.

Sodom and Gomora are located East of the Jordan and Dead Sea.

Kedorlaomer and his forces come from the North East... (from the region we know as Iran today. The cities and kings who fought with Sodom were from the area that is today – Iraq. ... Kedorloamer's military campaign would be a giant loop... travelling South... along the East side of the Jordan and Dead Sea... all the way around the Dead Sea... and then back... this time taking a route along the West side of the Jordan River and Dead Sea. On their way back up... they would have passed close to where Abram was living... and close to where Jerusalem is.

Kedorlaomer and his forces were four Kings. They came to fight against Sodom's larger force... which had five kings. Kedorloamer was probably outnumbered (a disadvantage.) ... Now anyone who knows about warfare... would immediately recognize several other **disadvantages**... Kedorlaomer and his troops would have.

They were far away from home. (Hundreds of miles separated them.) Their supply lines of resources to sustain their campaign would be limited. Replenishing lost man-power... food... and war materials would be hampered. (The home team always has the advantage here.) ... And also... because they were far away from home... they would not know the territory as well as the soldiers who lived there. The locals would know all the best places to draw their opponents to for battle. They could always have the most fortified positions... leaving the foreign invader exposed on an open battle field. It also opens the door for strategizing. For example... the nearby tar pits... could have been used as traps for their enemy.

But perhaps most important... the kings of Sodom and Gomora and their men were fighting for family... for home... and for dear life. That alone should put a backbone in any fighter. It always boosts motivation to fight harder. They have more to lose!

But Kedorloamer and the four attacking nations used good military strategy... Instead of directly attacking the five cities that were rebelling against Kedorlaomer... these four coalition nations... which came from the north... defeated the nations directly to the East... then the South... and then the West... of the five Kings who were in rebellion. ... This took out any aid the five cities might obtain from other city-states. Like a boa constrictor that squeezes its prey to death... the forces of Kedorloamer then rushed into Sodom and the other cities and quickly took them.

Genesis 14:9-11

Contrary to all expectations... the army of Sodom and her allies... put up a ***pitiful*** defense ... in spite of their favored situation for the battle. The defending soldiers immediately collapsed and ran for the hills.

Why did Sodom and her allies fall so quickly in the Dead Sea War? ... Why were they not able to use their advantageous situation to keep from falling? ... Why did they act so cowardly?

The answer is not hard to discover. It was their debauched manner of life that rendered them weak for battle. They had neither the courage nor the desire to fight the battle. They did not use their time to prepare for battle.

Ezekiel 16:49 (ESV)

Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease...

Sodomites were mainly interested in one thing – personal pleasure of the most vile and depraved manner! ... You cannot lay around in night clubs every night... live a life of luxury... and pamper the appetites of the body... and still develop good... robust soldier characteristics. ... Wine... women... and song... in heavy illicit doses... will defeat an army before it ever takes the battle field.

Tar pits are common in this area today. It is so rich in bitumen that large amounts bubble to the surface... and even float on the Dead Sea. ... The Valley of Siddim... back then... had many pits that had been dug to extract bitumen... and these provided refuge for the kings who ran away... (They “lowered themselves into them” rather than “they fell into them”).

The Hebrew word for "*they fell*" more literally means to lower and humiliate oneself. ... So... as we will see later... the king of Sodom was still alive... after his city collapsed. (He will later come before Abram... further down in verse 17.) So... the two kings were defeated in battle... were utterly debased and humiliated. They had to crawl and hide out in the slimy tar pits of the area.

There seems to be a poetic justice in it all. ... Sodom and Gomorrah were vile and filthy beyond words. ... Their sin was a stench in the nostrils of God. ... It was fitting that their kings should be hauled off to captivity all besmirched and bedaubed with slime. ... Filthy they were within... filthy they were without... It is evidence that God is never mocked... but does have a sense of humor.

The last time we saw Lot... he was dwelling in the cities of the plain and pitching his tent toward Sodom. Now he dwelt in Sodom. One step leads to

another. For a while he kept up the pretense of being a pilgrim... but soon the attractions of the capital proved too great for him... and he made his home in the filthiest city on the face of the earth. ... He looked toward Sodom — he pitched his tent toward Sodom — he dwelt in Sodom. ... Sodom... (a treacherous quicksand for the soul)... soon sucked Lot in.

Lot's greedy desire for the best of everything... led him into sinful surroundings. ... His burning desire for possessions and success... cost him his freedom and enjoyment. ... And now... as a captive to Kedorlaomer... he faced torture... slavery... or death.

In much the same way... we can be enticed into doing things or going places we shouldn't. ...The prosperity we long for is captivating... It can both entice us... and enslave us... if our motives are not in line with God's desires.

Lot's capture was God's way of disciplining him and reminding him that he had no business living in Sodom. ... God disciplines His children because He loves them and wants the best for them.

Proverbs 3:11-12 (ESV)

¹¹ My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline or be weary of his reproof, ¹² for the LORD reproofs him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.

If we don't listen to His rebukes... then He has to get our attention some other way; and that way is usually very painful.

Genesis 14:13

Some person escaped the invading army. ... He was probably from Sodom... because he knew Lot... and he knew that Abram and Lot were

relatives. ... As quickly as he could after his escape... he made his way to Abram and told him about Lot. ... The escaped fugitive could have easily made his way to some other sheik out in the country area... and he probably knew some other sheik... who also had relatives taken as prisoners of war. ... But he did not seek them; he sought Abram. Why?

Most likely there were two reasons. The fugitive knew that Abram offered the greatest hope... for his own personal safety and help... and for going after the murderous invaders... saving the captives and restoring their stolen goods.

The point is this: Abram was sought in the moment of crisis. Abram was known to be a man of faith and courage, and that was exactly what was now needed: great faith and great courage. Thus the escaped fugitive sought Abram's help. ... Suddenly he looked like a real source of help.

So it is with Christians who have courageous faith. The world may despise them and scorn them... but when the world gets in serious trouble... suddenly they want the Christians' help and prayers. ... The people of Sodom knew about Abraham. ... But they had nothing to do with him... of course. ... They were too interested in their wicked lifestyle... while Abraham was up in the hills trying to be holy. ... But when they got in trouble... then they took a different view of Abraham.

Abraham would enter the scene and things would change in a hurry. ... One man right with God can do more than a host of nations without God.

Genesis 14:14-15

This reveals something of the extent of Abram's possessions. It gives us some conception of the number of servants Abram had. ... In his own household... he could arm 318 men. ... How many did he have that he could not arm? ... For instance... there would also be women and children and the old folk -- but he could arm 318. ... To have that many hired hands indicates that Abram was carrying on quite a business of raising cattle and sheep.

Now... the sympathy for Lot... was pure grace. ... Lot had despised Abraham... who had been most generous in helping Lot. ... Lot had unhesitatingly and ungratefully taken first choice of the land. ... But Abraham exercised grace... and when he heard that Lot was captured... he unhesitatingly went after those who captured Lot... in order to rescue him.

It takes grace to rescue those who have gotten in trouble through sin. It is especially difficult to help those who have despised your advice... and your manner of life... but this is the grace that God exercises... in saving sinners. ... We will need to exercise the same grace, if we are to rescue sinners.

And take notice also... that the wisdom of the world would have dictated caution... ... It would have suggested Abram open negotiations with the victorious kings... Abram might have suggested sending Eliezer of Damascus on a swift camel... with a letter for Amraphel and Arioch and Kedorlaomar and Tidal... saying something like... *"My lords: You have amongst your captives a prisoner by the name of Lot. No doubt your intention is to sell him and his family into slavery in Mesopotamia. Since*

money is what you want... may I suggest a ransom? I will pay you to give him to me." ... The world would have whispered to Abram, "Money talks. You only need to speak the language of these bullies."

OR... ... Abram could easily have shrugged his shoulders and said:

"Well, it serves Lot right! He should have kept clear of Sodom. He should never have moved out of the fellowship of the Lord's people. Besides, what is all this to do with me? There's nothing I can do about it. I am a Hebrew; I'm not supposed to become entangled in the affairs of this world. I am to be separated from the world. Even with the best of intentions, what can I do for Lot now? If the five kings of the plain with all their armaments and troop concentrations could not conquer the kings of the east, it's for sure I can't. Besides, I'm a farmer, not a fighter. God has not called me to be a soldier but a saint. I don't know anything about war."

The weakness of the flesh could have suggested a **thousand** reasons why Abram should not become involved. This is something a person of faith without courage would do. But Abram was a dynamic believer... and he won his battle of cautious faith verses courageous faith.

The reasons Abram might have invented... we can concoct as well. Faced with a dying world... with teeming millions... who have never so much as heard John 3:16... what are we willing to do? ... Faced with the need of weaker brothers and sisters in Christ... being carried away by many hurtful and hateful lusts on TV and over the internet... what should we do? ... When we see a brother or sister in Christ defaming the Name of Christ... do we simply look the other way... instead of confronting them in their sin? We have our own families and our business to attend to. We have responsibilities at home.

A question needs to be asked at this point: *What will happen when we appear before God in judgment?* ... What will happen if we have never gone and attempted to rescue a brother from the enslavement of sin—never gone... not even once? ... What will be God's reaction?

Again, I ask: What good is your faith... if there is no courage?

Like Abram with his trained men... we must be prepared. The Christian soldier must wear the whole armor of God and use the spiritual weapons God has provided... Our weapons are spiritual... not fleshly... and we use them in the power of the Holy Spirit. ... The Word of God and prayer are our two most effective weapons... and we must use them by faith.

Our church (right now) is facing a very critical time. The elders need as many people of our congregation who have courageous faith to come join us in prayer. Please take part in the increased number of prayer gatherings that we have been announcing.

What Abram exemplified in verse 15... is that all attempts to rescue people from sin and Satan... must be planned... wisely planned! Courageous faith requires wisdom.

Abram pursued these men all the way north to Damascus -- that is quite a stretch. ... Apparently... what Abram did was to divide his servants. ... One group made an attack... probably from the rear... as they were pursuing them. ... The other group went around... and when the enemy turned to fight the first group... the second group came down upon them. ... Also... Abram and his forces launched a surprise attack at night. ... The enemy

was caught completely off guard. They were unable to tell who was attacking them... and for safety's sake... they had to flee assuming that a much larger army than what it actually was... was attacking them.

The result was... that Abram was able to get a victory. At least he was able to scatter them so that they fled across the desert... leaving the people and the booty they had captured.

Genesis 14:16

Abraham and his allies chased the enemy for 100 miles... freed all the captives... and recovered all the spoils. ... Did Abraham and his worldly nephew have a long talk as they rode back? ... Did Lot keep the promises he made while he was in danger? ... Did he make any promises to Abraham?

We cannot answer those questions... but we do know this: Neither the Lord's chastening... nor Abram's goodness in rescuing Lot... did him any good. ... The goodness of God should have led him to repentance... but instead of repenting... Lot returned to Sodom. ... He could have been reunited with Abraham... but he chose to go back to sin.

Abram was victorious in battle... victorious against a large invading army. He had shown unusual courage and faith in God... despite impossible odds... and his courage and faith had paid off. ... Abram had won the impossible victory that saved thousands from the tyranny of defeat and enslavement. ... Now recognition and honor were about to be heaped upon him. ... How would he respond?

Would he revel in the praise himself... or would he give God the glory? ... Would he boast in his own ability and courage... or would he acknowledge that his ability and courage was of God? ... Would he act in self-sufficiency... or would he acknowledge that he was totally dependent upon God? ... Would he keep the spoils of victory... or would he share the spoils?

Sometimes you face your greatest dangers after you have won a battle. It was after the capture of Jericho that Israel's self-confidence led it into defeat at Ai (Josh. 7)... and after his success on Mount Carmel... Elijah panicked and ran away in fear (1 Kings 19). ... We need to be as watchful after the victory as before the battle. ... "**Success with your faith is never final**; failure with your faith is never fatal; it is courage with your faith that counts."

A seductive form of temptation was to be put before Abram. ... When Abraham returned from battle, he was met by two kings: Bera, King of Sodom ("burning"), and Melchizedek, King of Salem ("peace"). Bera offered Abraham all the spoils in return for the people, while Melchizedek gave Abraham bread and wine.

Genesis 14:18-24

Abraham rejected Bera's offer but accepted the bread and wine from Melchizedek and gave him tithes of the spoils.

Salem had not been attacked by the invading army so far as the record shows. But Melchizedek knew that the Eastern invaders could have returned to conquer not only Salem but all of Canaan. But Abram had eliminated the danger of attack by defeating the invaders from the East.

For this... Melchizedek was very thankful and appreciative. So he... too... gathered up his entourage... and came out to express his deep gratitude for the great victory won by Abram.

The significant fact about Melchizedek is that he was a priest of God... the Most High God (El Elyon). Melchizedek was representing God and bringing the honor of God to Abram.

"Brought forth bread and wine". The bread and wine would be welcomed by Abraham's group... for it represented the fundamental food needs of the men. ... But the bread and wine here also speak of Christ's redemptive work. This is emphasized by the fact that right after the words *"bread and wine"* are mentioned in our text,...it is stated that *"he was the priest of the most high God"* (verse18). ... The bread and wine are the two elements used to observe the Lord's Supper. ... The bread and wine speak of two things in our text. ... They speak of refreshment and of redemption. Christ is both for us.

No doubt the blessing of the priest helped Abram keep everything in perspective. It was the **Lord** who would bless Abram... not some pagan king... Abram did not receive honors from Sodom. Abram got his honors from Melchizedek... who represented God and righteousness.

Abram... because he loved God and wanted to acknowledge His greatness and goodness... tithed to the Lord... by giving to Melchizedek. This is the first mention of tithes that we see in the Bible. And notice that this was long before God told Moses to write it on stone as part of the law. ... Not only did Abram tithe (before the Law required it)... but so did Jacob (Genesis 28:12.)

Abram provides us with a good example about giving. It should be because we want to acknowledge God's greatness and goodness. We must give out of the devotion of our hearts... not as a bribe to try and secure God's future blessings. If you tithe because it pays – it won't pay!

Having had his significant meeting with the king of Salem... Abram now had a *sinister meeting with the king of Sodom* (in verses 21-24). If Melchidezek typified Christ... the king of Sodom typified Satan. The time after a great victory is always a time of spiritual peril for a believer. ... Satan will lose no time in mounting his counterattack.

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Let's consider... the presumption of Sodom's king. Abraham had recovered all the people and their possessions. Abram could keep everything for himself. He was the conqueror... and in war... the conqueror has the right to all the spoils. ... Bara was completely out-of-line to assume he had something to bargain with. The king of Sodom had failed to protect both people and possessions of Sodom. But here... he expects to have the people and his kingdom back. ... Wicked men think themselves entitled to much more than they deserve.

But why didn't Abram keep the spoils...? Why did he give both people and possessions back to this loser of a king? The answer is found in his reply to the King of Sodom. Abram was prepared for the temptation of gaining so much more wealth and power... as though he was ALREADY the possessor of Canaan - before God was ready to give it to him. ... Abram had... in his hands... the golden ticket for him to possess the land and all

these grateful people... who now adored him... Abram was in the driver's seat to be the most powerful man in Canaan. It was his for the taking.

But Abram knew that this was not God's plan. **God** would give the land to him and his descendants – not a wicked king or group of kings. ... Abram had prayed... before going into battle. He had cast his life and the outcome of the battle upon God. And during his commune with God... Abram found resolve to refuse to allow wicked kings think that they made him rich... or that **they** gave Canaan over to him. So Abram made a vow to God that he would take nothing... not even a shoelace! ... Faith looks beyond the riches of the world to the greater blessings that God has in store.

Abram would **not** be running ahead of God's plans. ... Boy that takes a courageous faith... doesn't it...? ... If we are believing God for something... and an easy way opens up before us... cautious faith will not wait... or even check to see if it is part of God's plan. ... But Abram checked with God... BEFORE he went into battle.

And there is another reason for Abram's rejection of King Bara's offer. Abram would not be beholding to anyone but God. ... The world is only too ready to offer God's children its subsidies... so as to bring them under obligation to itself. ... Here lies one of the greatest pieces of wisdom: the importance of rejecting anything that relinquishes control of our life to anyone - but **God**. ... If ANYONE ever "blesses you" and it makes you feel as though you now have a greater allegiance to **them**... instead of God (and the clear teaching of His Word)... you did not act with the wisdom... or courageous faith that Abram displayed in our passage today...

A courageous faith looks beyond the riches of the world... to the greater blessings that God has in store... for those who have their greatest allegiance to Him and His Word.

“Success with your faith is never final; failure with your faith is never fatal; it is courage with your faith that counts.”

Do you live cautiously or courageously for Christ?