

Talk Number Four

# God promises a new world



Sometimes a wife can get upset with her husband because when all she wants to do is pour out her heart to him, tell him about a situation and for him to listen lovingly, the husband moves effortlessly into problem solving mode! Although there may be an element of gender stereotyping in that scenario, there is enough truth for it to strike a chord with many of us who are married! But sometimes, even for the best problem-solver, the problem is so big and the mess so bad that we need someone outside the situation to solve the problem. Even if we don't recognise it!

In our last session we discovered the disturbing truth that the discrepancy between the world we all want and the world we all experience is actually down to us. We are in a mess and it is us that has got us here! This world we all know is the world of our own making because of our wilful rejection of God.

Our task in this session is to see how God was not content to leave it there, but immediately implemented the rescue plan he had formulated before time began. We will see how the story of Abraham moves the story of God's rescue along. It gives an insight into who God is and also hope in what he is doing.

## 1. God promises a people who know God

It is always interesting to find out what pictures people have in their minds about God. Some people view him as a fearful character; a stern headmaster with a cane and a constant frown. But many others think of him (when they do) as kindly and indulgent; a gentle grandfather with mandatory long white beard. We have a saying: to err (do things wrong) is human; to forgive is divine. We like the thought of a God who simply forgives. It is just what he does. For many people the idea of forgiveness is simply turning a blind eye - pretending that something did not happen. At one level, that approach sounds attractive. We all like the thought that someone will do that to us when we have done something wrong. But further thought shows it is a totally unsatisfactory response to evil and wrongdoing. Most people would rightly be repulsed by the idea of a God who could simply turn a blind eye to what Hitler did, or Pol Pot, and welcome them into heaven. And what kind of God would he be if he accepted a simple 'Sorry' of a serial rapist?

Genesis 3 shows us that rejecting God has terrible consequences. We live with them every day and we see them affect our world. When we rejected God we became his enemies! He was angry with the first man and woman, and he continues to be angry with people as we continue to reject him. But God was never prepared to leave it with humans rejecting him and spoiling his world. The final word could not be human rebellion. The story of Abraham shows how God was always going to rescue the situation and turn people around to love and serve him.

In order to achieve this, God focuses in on one man. Through Abraham and his descendants, God would once again bless all nations. God promises a people who will

be his people. When we rejected God we became his enemies. Now God promises that once again people can be his friends.

It was the English playwright William Shakespeare who placed on the lips of one of his characters the rhetorical question "What's in a name?" Apparently, the required answer was 'Nothing' because Juliet goes on to say: *That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet*. But names are very important throughout the Bible, and when a change of name occurs it is significant and revealing, as it was with Abraham. When he was first called out of the city of Ur, his name was Abram, which means 'exalted father'. But then God changes his name to Abraham, which means 'father of many'. This multitude that Abraham will be God's new humanity: a people who love God and serve God and know God.

## **2. God promises a land of plenty and security**

The account of Genesis 3 tells us what we know is already true. The world we all want has been spoiled and damaged. When we rejected God we spoiled God's world. We continue to spoil it. Many scientists believe our world is facing ecological disaster through our use and abuse of the natural resources. Some predict that at current rates of consumption, most of the world's resources of oil, natural gas, water, wood, topsoil, fish and other foods will be gone from the Earth by 2050! Apparently, the rate of depletion of the Amazon Rain Forest is occurring at a greater rate than ever; despite years of ecology awareness education. We also see terrible inequality in our world. In our saner moments we recognise the obscenity of the situation in which people are dying because they eat too much in one part of the world and people in others parts of the world are dying because they do not have enough.

When God speaks to Abraham, he promises a land of blessing, and this is the world we all want. It is a land of abundance and freedom; a land of free flowing rivers and giant sized fruit. It is a land of plenty. The Bible often describes it as a land of 'rest'. Imagine getting home after a hard day's work or a long walk through the rain over the mountains. You walk into your home where it is warm and dry. There is hot water for a bath and plenty of food in the kitchen. Everything you could want is there. You can lie back in your bath and breathe a great sigh of relief and satisfaction. This is rest and this is what God promises his people. We have spoiled God's good world. But God promises Abraham a new world - a world of plenty and security.

## **3. God makes Abraham right with God**

The problem with a new world is this: it sounds fine until you put people in it! Is the world we have now that we all know and experience the world we all want? Of course not! But as we have seen, the problem is not 'out there'. The problem is 'in here', inside each and every one of us. We always end up spoiling things by doing something stupid. It might be encouraging to realise that we are not alone in that, and neither are we the first. Abraham was also capable of great stupidity and disobedience.

*Look at Genesis 12:10-20.* Instead of bringing blessing to the nations, Abraham brings a curse. To be around Abraham was not good for your health! That is not how it was meant to be. Although Abraham was a friend of God and chosen by him to be the means of great blessing to the human race, Abraham was a flawed and fallible individual. Pretty much like you and me I guess! He was only human. He was never everything he was meant to be.

This raises an important question and shows us to a vital truth. How is God going to keep his promise of creating the kind of world we all want if we are in it? The way God deals with Abraham answers that important question. If we are to be God's people and enjoy the world we all want, God must deal with our slavery to sin *and* also satisfy his legitimate response of anger at our sin.

Look at Genesis 15:6 and Romans 4:1-8. Righteousness means 'being right with God', and it is a very important word. It was a word often used in the context of a courtroom. The defendant would appear before the judge. The charges would be read out and the evidence heard. On the basis of the evidence, the judge would pass the verdict of either 'guilty' or 'righteous'. In Abraham's case, the Judge was God and his verdict was 'righteous'. Abraham was right with God, acquitted and in good standing because God said he was. God had made an astounding promise to Abraham and Abraham had taken God at his word. Abraham had trusted God rather than trusting in himself. In that simple act of faith, the promises of God were coming true. As the story of Abraham develops we find him behaving increasingly in ways that reflect that verdict passed by God on his behalf.

If God is going to create the world we all want he must make us right with him. He must find a way to forgive our sins without ignoring what we have done. He must also find a way of giving us new hearts - hearts that love him and serve him. It is not going to happen overnight, but it will happen in the right way and at just the right speed.