

Doing and Saying – a Christian Pilgrimage

Matthew Chapter One, The Patriarchs – Week 46

Let's meet the family.

Day 315. All in the Family

Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, Judah the father of Perez and Zerah (by Tamar), Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz (by Rahab), Boaz the father of Obed (by Ruth), Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king.

David was the father of Solomon (by the wife of Uriah), Solomon the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asa, Asa the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, Joram the father of Uzziah, Uzziah the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amon, Amon the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

After the deportation to Babylon, Jeconiah became the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, Abiud the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor, Azor the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Achim, Achim the father of Eliud, Eliud the father of Eleazar, Eleazar the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

Now comes a genealogy, a proper list of family history. Genealogies, member lists, rolls – they are all very valuable indicators of who or what one belongs to. Parishes have their lists, political parties have their members, even nations have their citizens with rules about who are in and who are out. What type of family does Matthew say Jesus belongs to? Who has he picked as His notable forebears? Let's look at that now.

Why is it important to know what a person belongs to? What type of family do you think Jesus belongs to? What are the characteristics of the family you belong to?

Share your thoughts with those you trust.

Day 316: The Patriarchs

In Jesus' time, and in some cultures today, who your family was defined your role in society and even your occupation. Royalty is inherited, as can be trades, land, and power and privilege or the lack thereof. Matthew's list of Jesus' ultimate forebears is very impressive, and common to all Israelites: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Their story is told in the book of Genesis, chapters 12 to 36. Abraham is the one who God made covenants with (as shared last week). God then repeated the covenant He had made with Abraham, with Isaac:

I will be with you and will bless you, for I will give all these lands to you and to your descendants, and I will fulfill the solemn promise I made to your father Abraham. I will multiply your descendants so they will be as numerous as the stars in the sky, and I will give them all these lands. All the nations of the earth will pronounce blessings on one another using the name of your descendants. (Genesis 26:3-4)

God repeated that again with Jacob, as recorded in Genesis 28: Jacob fell asleep in that place and had a dream. He saw a stairway erected on the earth with its top reaching to the heavens. The angels of God were going up and coming down it and the Lord stood at its top. He said, "I am the Lord, the God of your grandfather Abraham and the God of your father Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the ground you are lying on. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west, east, north, and south. And so all the families of the earth may receive blessings through you and through your descendants. I am with you! I will protect you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I promised you!"

Genesis chapters 12 to 36 are well worth reading to understand what the Israelites recorded regarding these three. They are the founding fathers of the people and held in high esteem – thought they had all-to-human faults and failures, too.

Let us spend some time exploring these three before we move on further.

A covenant is a binding agreement between two parties. Why would God enter a covenant with people? Why would the covenant He entered with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob be so important to them and to their descendants?

Share with your thoughts fellow explorers.

Day 317: Abraham

Abraham was a vagabond, a liar, self-seeking, cowardly, grasping and insecure.

Abraham was the father of nations, faithful, sacrificing, brave, generous and confident.

Like many people, Abraham was a complex person.

He followed God into the unknown, leaving his family to journey to a strange land with his wife, nephew, slaves and belongings, showing great trust in God and His providing (read Genesis 12:1-5).

In his next adventure he lies to protect himself, putting his wife at risk, while shrewdly taking advantage of the situation and becoming very wealthy, essentially prostituting Sarai (read Genesis 12:10-16). He did this not once, but twice (Genesis chapter 20).

Abraham is then very generous to his nephew, letting him choose the best of the land for his own flocks and people, while Abraham took what Lot didn't desire (Genesis 13:5-12).

Perhaps the strangest story with Abraham is his attempted sacrifice of his son Isaac (Genesis chapter 22).

Abraham is considered the father of Israel. How would you describe a people who identify with one like him? Looking at the various interactions Abraham has with God, as depicted in Genesis, how would you describe the relationship between the two?

Share with your fellow explorers.

Day 318: Abraham's sacrifice

God must be terrible, mean, even narcissistic or possibly psychopathic to want a man to kill his own son for Him.

Why do you say that?

I mean, asking Abraham to kill Isaac is far, far away from Christ and "Love your neighbour as you love yourself."

I think I hear you. However, I think it is one of the most Christ-like examples given in the Old Testament.

Ummm ... How can you claim that in the slightest?

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone wants to become my follower, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me will find it. (Matthew 16:24-25)

What was Abraham's cross?

His life?

What did he value most of all? What did he live for?

Power? How would I know?

You're right that we can't know for certain, but we can make educated guesses. Let's look at the covenants: what did God consistently promise Abraham?

In Genesis 12:1-3, God promised to make Abraham into a great nation, and all the families of the earth may receive blessing through Abraham. In Genesis 15:1-7, God promises Abraham his descendants will be as numerous as the stars in heaven, and He will give him a land to possess. In Genesis 17:2-8, God reaffirms both promises. In Genesis 17:19, God informs Abraham that His covenant will come through Isaac, whom God will provide to Abraham as a son.

And now God has asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac.

Which doesn't make any sense – why murder your only son, when he is the key to your legacy?

Exactly.

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It still doesn't make any sense.

You may be right: possibly, what mattered the most to Abraham, what he prized most highly, is that he has a legacy. He was to be the father of nations, and every family on earth be blessed through him and his descendants. His descendants will be so numerous they can't be counted. That dream was core to his very existence. And then God came and said to him (paraphrasing very badly):

If you want to follow Me, deny yourself. Lose your life to find it. Your life is bound in Isaac – are you willing to lose him?

And Abraham said 'yes.'

And then Abraham found, paradoxically, through the love of God he was given Isaac back, and through Isaac, he was indeed given much, much more. He died being buried by Isaac and Ishmael, having had more children and having known his grandchildren. God kept his promise, and Abraham found his life.

The key to a life with God is to deny yourself for God – anything else is idolatry. This is core to Jesus' teaching.

What are your thoughts on the last paragraph above? On the story of Abraham sacrificing Isaac?

Share your thoughts with your fellow disciples.

Day 319: Isaac

As we said in Day 316, God repeated the promise He had made to Abraham with Isaac. Isaac repeated some of Abraham's adventures: Isaac's wife was without child, so Isaac prayed for her and then she had children. Isaac told the same foreign king that his wife (Rebekah in this case) was his sister, just as Abraham had done with Sarah. Isaac became wealthy compared to those around him.

Do patterns seem to follow in families? If so, why do you think that is?

Share your thoughts with your fellow explorers.

Day 320: Jacob

Isaac and Rebekah had twin sons, though Esau was born first – and they did not get along. Much of the early story of Jacob involves how he usurped his brother's position of influence and power, with his mother's aid. Trickery seems to be a family trait, and Jacob was well named for this (Jacob means "one who grasps" or "supplanter"). Jacob had notable encounters with God, among them Genesis 28:10-22 and Genesis 32:22-32.

In the first encounter, Jacob receives the same promise from God as his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac had – with the addition of "I am with you! I will protect you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I promised you!" God promised that Jacob would experience the promise.

The second encounter with God is a strange one (almost all encounters with God seem strange to our perceptions and experience of the world, I suspect). During this encounter, Jacob is given a new identity, and he is renamed from Jacob to Israel. The meaning of Israel is broadly accepted as "God fights" or "God prevails" or "God wrestler". Israel can therefore mean both "one who fights with God" and "one who God fights for." The supplanter had become the one who God fights for.

Is that like baptism?

What do you mean?

We are named in baptism. We can even choose (or be given) a new name.

Great insight. In baptism, your identity with God is established within the community – naming you describes who you are, in one-ness with the one who wrestles for (and with) you – the Holy Spirit, God. In Christ, we are the New Israel, the New Creation of God.

Describe:

- a.) Some of how you have wrestled with God over your life
- b.) Some of how God has wrestled for you.
- c.) What promise have you received from God?

Share your descriptions with your fellow Explorers in Christ.

Day 321: Rest

Rest, receive nourishment, feed both body and soul. Reflect on the past week and care for your needs (body and spirit). Pray. Dedicate this day to God. Worship! In the evening get together with a group you trust and share what you would like to from the previous week – good points, hard points, what you've learned, what you've struggled with, etc. Decide again if you wish to continue journeying together or want to stop.

Know that God loves you. Celebrate, Rejoice, Give thanks, talk and walk with God.