

Planting Trees

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Is This Necessary?*

33Then Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there called on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God. **34**And Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines many days.

1. Let me ask you a question as we begin this morning – SO WHAT?
2. Who cares if Abraham planted a tree?
3. What possible difference could recording this make for us?
4. Is this just textual “filler” or could it be that there’s something for us to glean, even from this seemingly useless piece of information?
5. Let me ask this – is ALL scripture inspired by God and profitable for our instruction?

B. *Indeed!*

1. Indeed!
2. This is one of those passages that’s easy to hurry over on our way to the more exciting and seemingly important events of scripture.
3. But the Holy Spirit has something crucial for us right here in the little mention of Abraham’s planting a tree.

II. TEXT

A. *Background*

1. At this point Abraham is about 105.
 - a. Isaac, the long awaited son of his wife Sarah is about 5 years old.
 - b. Sarah is 95, and together they form a family that’s become the nexus of a sizeable nomadic community.
2. Earlier in this chapter we read Abraham had moved his camp to what would later be called Beersheba.
 - a. this was the extreme southern end of acceptable grazing land for his extensive flocks and herds.
 - b. water was scarce there but Abraham had dug a well that produced an abundance of water and turned what had been an arid desert into an oasis.
 - c. in fact, whatever Abraham did prospered and it didn’t take long for the local Philistine ruler, Abimelech, to realize that Abraham enjoyed the favor and blessing of God.
 - d. he’s watched Abraham for some time and saw his fortune and power grow,
 - e. so he determined to make a peace-pact with him.
3. Abraham saw this invitation to peace as one more sign of the Lord’s favor and as it says here in v. 34, he ended up staying in this region for some time.

B. Abraham Plants Trees

1. That's when we read he planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba.
2. Have you ever planted a tree? Think about what planting a tree means.
 - a. the thing that makes most trees different from other plants is that they grow more slowly, but they grow much larger.
 - b. people who plant trees aren't looking for flowers this year.
 - c. they are looking for shade or fruit many years out.
3. My family moved from the Midwest to Southern California in the mid-60's.
 - a. my parents bought a brand new tract home that had no landscaping whatsoever – just dirt.
 - b. we put in the lawn, flower beds, and some trees.
 - c. but the only trees we could afford were tiny little things in 3 gallon buckets.
 - d. we bought 4 Italian cypresses, those evergreen trees that are real narrow but grow straight up.
 - e. they were maybe 4 ft. tall when we planted them
 - f. but when we moved years later, they were a good 25 ft in the air and gave considerable shade.
4. Abraham planted a tamarisk tree.
 - a. some Bibles translate this as a “grove” and really, the language tends toward that idea –
 - b. you see, the tamarisk is a species of evergreen that would be perfectly suited to that climate and conditions of Beersheba.
 - c. it's a shrub-like tree that wouldn't really do much if it was just by itself.
 - d. so tamarisks grow in a group; they love sandy arid places and thrive in soil with a high salt content.
 - e. their branches and twigs are thin but produce a dense covering of needle-like leaves that make for great shade.
 - f. if they're arranged in a grove and watered, they'll grow to a height of twenty ft.
5. Do you see what Abraham was doing?
 - a. prior to his arrival, this was a virtual desert.
 - b. but he dug a well and made it an oasis.
 - c. he knew that the Lord had given him and his descendants this entire land.
 - d. and in preparation for the future, he set about to make this place more hospitable –
 - e. he planted a grove of evergreens so that future generations could enjoy their shade.
6. Remember, he's 105; once he moves the community away from Beersheba, he knows there's little chance that he'll be back.
 - a. but Abraham's not thinking of himself
 - b. he's thinking of God's promise to his descendants.
 - c. and he can SEE the faithfulness of God to keep His promise as he gazes on young Isaac!
 - d. as he looks at the lad, he seems more than one child, he sees a vast nation living throughout the land he's only traveled through for the last 30 years.
7. This place where he is right now, Beersheba, though now a desert, is part of the

- land God has given to him and his descendants and will one day be a rich oasis.
8. So in anticipation of those coming generations, he plants a grove of evergreens.

C. Daily Faithfulness

1. Though v. 33 seems at first glance to be an uninteresting little detail, in fact it's a profound evidence of Abraham's faith in the Lord.
2. The important thing for us to glean is how Abraham's faith translated itself into daily faithfulness & obedience.
3. When we think of Abraham, we tend to remember those crisis moments at which his faith stood out strong.
 - a. we think of Abraham rescuing his nephew Lot from the northern kings.
 - b. we picture him standing before the Lord or interceding on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah
 - c. or we see him on Mt. Moriah with the sacrificial knife raised over Isaac.
 - d. these are the stories we love – these are the scenes the Renaissance painters like Rembrandt depicted.
4. When we think of Abraham, we rarely if ever think of him planting trees or digging wells.
5. That's far too mundane and daily for the lofty image we have of the Father of the Faithful and the man whom scripture calls the Friend of God.
6. What we must understand is that the rescue of Lot, the intercession for Sodom, and the faith to offer up Isaac are all the result, the fruit of the kind of daily faithfulness that digs wells and plants trees.
7. If there'd been neither wells nor trees, there'd have been no rescue of Lot, no intercession for the cities of the Plain, or offering on Mt. Moriah.

D. Noteworthy

1. On Wednesday of this past week, Kobe Bryant became the youngest player in NBA history to score 10,000 points.
 - a. in fact, Bryant's been red-hot lately!
 - b. he added some 20 lbs. between last year and this season and the extra muscle has made a real difference in his play.
 - c. Kobe worked out very hard in the pre-season, and now he and the Lakers, are reaping the benefits.
2. Read almost any biography of the notable people throughout history and you'll typically read stories of these men and women accomplishing some great feat, or facing some crisis, some event that calls forth the greatness for which they become famous.
3. We read of Churchill and his bold stand against Hitler during WWII.
 - a. we read of William Wilberforce and his eloquent and patient opposition to slavery in England -
 - b. Abraham Lincoln's towering figure during the dark days of the Civil War as he worked to preserve the Union -
 - c. or of George Washington who almost single-handedly brought about unity among the warring factions that threatened to tear the American Republic apart before it had even begun.

4. I could go on, mentioning person after person whose name you would recognize.
 - a. and for each of them, we'd remember them for the challenge they faced and overcame.
 - b. or, in the case of the infamous, for the challenge they faced and were defeated by!
5. For instance, when I say, "King David" what do you think of? Most think of a young boy standing toe-to-toe with the Philistine giant Goliath.
6. When I say, "Daniel" most will think of a lion's den.
7. When I say "Shadrach, Meshech, and Abed-Nego" we think of a fiery furnace.

E. Ordinary

1. What we can easily miss when we read biographies and the stories of the great people of the past is the role & importance of their ordinary and everyday lives.
2. It isn't real exciting reading about the daily routine of Churchill or Lincoln.
3. We don't really care too awfully much what Washington had for breakfast;
 - a. tell us again about the hatchet and the cherry tree.
 - b. tell us about his career as an officer at the Battle of Fort Duquesne.
 - c. tell us about Valley Forge, but please, spare us the details about his morning ritual.
 - d. it just isn't interesting!
4. What's important to realize is that the moments of greatness the notable men and women of history have been able to accomplish came from a depth of character shaped by their daily lives!
5. Greatness is the fruit, the result of a carefully cultivated life.
 - a. David slew Goliath because as a mere shepherd lad, he'd faithfully committed himself to protect his father Jesse's flock of sheep.
 - 1) when a bear came out one day to rip off one of the lambs, he killed it!
 - 2) on another occasion when a lion came, he killed that as well.
 - 3) David knew Goliath would fall because he was a predator who was menacing an even larger and more precious flock – Israel, the flock of his Heavenly Father.
 - 4) David rose to greatness that day on the field of battle simply because he'd cultivated a faithful shepherd's heart in his daily life.
 - 5) would he have gone out against Goliath if he'd run from the previous lesser threats tot his father's flock,
 - 6) or if he'd ditched his task as shepherd to go play with his friends?
 - b. Daniel survived a night with some very large and hungry kitties simply because he had cultivated a heart of faithfulness to the Lord in his daily routine.
 - 1) when the order came that none could pray to anyone but the king of Persia,
 - 2) Daniel continued his daily practice of faithfulness to the Lord and bowed in prayer to God.
 - 3) for this, he was arrested and thrown to the lions.
 - 4) but even those lions recognized the greatness of the man who'd been

tossed to them and refused to eat one on whom the favor of God rested so heavily.

- 5) instead, they offered themselves as pillows!
- 6) would Daniel have prayed when it was dangerous if he'd failed to pray when it wasn't?
 - c. Shadrach, Meshech, and Abed-Nego were able to brave the wrath of the king of Babylon and the flames of his furnace because they'd cultivated a daily faithfulness to the Lord.
 - 1) when the challenge came to bow in worship before the king's golden image, they stood alone amidst thousands of those who bowed,
 - 2) because they daily bowed their knees to the God of heaven.
6. Greatness is not a surprise! It's the result of a carefully cultivated daily life of faithfulness.
7. Remarkable moments of victory are merely the fruit of a faith that finds expression in daily victory.
8. Long before the hero does something heroic, he/she lives an ordinary life of faithfulness in the daily challenges that come his/her way.
9. When we read the stories of the heroes of the Bible, when we read history and encounter the stories of those great men and women of the past, we feel a longing to face the big challenge, the monumental struggle and to overcome!
10. Last week Wes Bentley spoke of the heroic struggle of the Christians of Southern Sudan.
 - a. though history won't record the names of the hundreds, even thousands of our brothers and sisters in Christ who have bravely faced martyrdom,
 - b. we hear of their struggle and their faithfulness and are inspired!
 - c. we ask ourselves what we would do if our entire family were lined up in front of us and shot one at a time.
 - d. we ask what we would do if a bayonet were placed at our chest and we were given the choice of renouncing Christ or dying.
 - e. we hope, we pray that we'd have the courage to remain faithful.
11. Do we understand that such courage is based on a life of consistent courage NOW?
 - a. before Goliath, David faced a bear and lion.
 - b. and so before you and I will ever be faced with martyrdom, we'll be faced with smaller deaths –
 - c. the daily dying to self that is the essence of the call to follow Christ.
 - d. Jesus said that if we would follow Him we must take up our cross daily.
 - e. what makes us think we could face martyrdom when we can't even get out of bed a half hour earlier in the morning to spend time with the Lord?
 - f. what makes us think we'll be able to resist sexual temptation when we invest in lurid daydreams and fantasies or can't change channels when the lingerie commercials come on?
 - g. what makes us think we'll be able to resist the temptation to steal from the store when we're pilfering office supplies from work?
12. Faithfulness and obedience in the big things is built and enabled by faithfulness and obedience in the little things first.
13. Jesus said, "He who is faithful with little, will be faithful with much. But he

- who cannot be faithful with little, won't be faithful in much." [Luke 16:10-12]
14. It's interesting to me that Jesus spoke these words in the context of the use of money.
 - a. He said that the way in which we use money is actually an evidence of the faithfulness of our hearts toward spiritual things.
 - b. He made a connection between monetary value and things of spiritual value.
 - c. our attitude toward money correlates to our attitude toward the things of God.
 - d. I'm not saying that – Jesus said that. In Luke 16:10-12 we read -

10He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. 11Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? 12And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own?

 - e. there are some poor people who resent their poverty and yet they're poor because of their own choices.
 - 1) they long for the day when they'll win the lottery or find they've inherited a fortune.
 - 2) but there's no thought whatsoever of being faithful with the dollar or two they have in their hand right now.
 - 3) no, they spend it on a candy bar or rent a video.
 - 4) just a lousy dollar, no fortune!
 - 5) how many videos and candy bars do they buy over the years that become a fortune?
 - f. then there's that rare individual who's poor, but sees in that same dollar an entire future; so he takes it and invests it.
 - 1) in a year it's earned 5 cents interest, but in 20 years it's turned into \$15.
 - 2) and because he's saved other dollars besides that first, he's a wealthy man.
15. This isn't just a story, this happens every day all around us.
16. And just as it's true in the natural realm with money, so it's true in the spiritual realm with the coin of faith.
 - a. every day you and I are faced with subtle choices to faithfulness, of sowing to the spirit or sowing to the flesh.
 - b. are we impoverishing our souls or investing in eternal treasure?
 - c. are we spiritually poor because we keep investing in the passing things of the world, or are we indeed piling up treasure in heaven?
17. I'm not talking now about money – I'm talking about simple faithfulness and obedience to the Lord.

III. CONCLUSION

A. *Looking To The Future*

1. Though he was over 100, Abraham planted a grove of evergreens in Beersheba.
2. He knew he would never really be able to enjoy the shade they would one day

provide, but he didn't live for himself alone.

3. He lived a life of faithfulness that looked to the future.
4. He walked in simple obedience and left the future in the Lord's hands.
5. Notice what it says in v. 33 –

Then Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there called on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God.

6. This is the first time Abraham used this name for God – El Olam: God Eternal.
 - a. Abraham knew he would pass away but his passing wouldn't mean the end of God's faithfulness.
 - b. men and women come and go, but God is eternal and His promises are sure to every generation.
 - c. all of the promises God had spoken to Abraham had been promised to his descendants through Isaac.
 - d. Abraham was just the first link in a long chain of faith and he determined to make that link a strong one.
 - e. even though he would never enjoy the shade of those tamarisk trees, he knew God's plan and promise would be carried on in the generations to come and he wanted to leave a testimony and encouragement to their faith so they too would remain faithful in their generation, adding to the chain of faith their own solid links.
7. And so it is with us.
8. We may never go down in history as notable people.
 - a. chances are, we'll never be called on to rise to some great and remarkable challenge that history will look back on as heroic.
 - b. we'll probably live our lives in relative obscurity and then, barring the Lord's return, follow those who've come and gone before.
 - c. but right now, today, tomorrow, we have the opportunity to plant some trees future generations can enjoy the shade of.
 - d. we can do that in the simple faithfulness of our daily lives.
 - e. parents can especially do that in the raising of their children, for our children ARE the shade trees of the next generation!
 - 1) secular humanism and materialism are quickly making a moral desert of our culture
 - 2) the greatest gift that we can give to this world is a generation of young people whose hearts are sold out to God and who will faithfully follow Him.
 - 3) they can become the tamarisk trees we plant today that will be the oasis of tomorrow.
 - f. but our children will only become that if they see it in us on a daily basis right now.
9. And you don't have to be a physical mother or father in order to do such spiritual tree planting.
 - a. you can have a huge impact on the next generation as a teacher or assistant in the Children's and youth ministry.
 - b. [Donna Ward's Dad – Seniors are one of the great resources of the church!]
 - c. the role you play in cultivating a life of faith in a young person can pay

- dividends in hundreds, even thousands of other lives in years to come.
10. Each tamarisk tree, when it flowers, sends forth some half million seeds!
 - a. the tamarisk, which isn't native to North America, was introduced from the Middle East some 30 years ago as an erosion control agent.
 - b. it spreads so rapidly that it's now taken over large parts of the Southwestern desert and the National Park & Forest Services are frantic to halt it's spread!
 11. Abraham planted a grove of tamarisk trees.
 - a. a generation later when his descendants returned, there was a miniature forest of trees -
 - b. an oasis in the midst of the desert.

B. An Oasis

1. That's what daily faithfulness produces – an oasis of spiritual life in the midst of the burning desert of this world.
2. When we gather on Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings, what happens here isn't some special event that comes as the result of slick preparation of a few.
3. What happens here is the cumulative result of all of our daily faithfulness as the Lord faithfully pours His grace on us.
4. I know we all want our church to be a place of life, an oasis where the thirsty can find drink and the hungry can find food.
5. Realize that it isn't Peter's and my job to make that happen.
6. We all participate in seeing this become a spiritual oasis by how we live Monday – Saturday.
7. You and I are part of that chain of faith Abraham started 4000 years ago!
8. Our daily faithfulness to the Lord, especially in the little things, works to make our link strong.