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Our Pulpit.

Abraham the Friend of God.

THE HERO'S REWARD

SERMON PREACHED BY

REV. A. J. MOWATT.

In St. Paul's Church, Fredericton, March 18th.
"I am thy shield, and thy exceeding
great reward."—GEN. XV. 1.

Last Sabbath evening, you will re-
member, we saw Abraham returning in
triumph from his brilliant victory over
the Kings of the east to his home at
Hebron. We saw him honored and fe-
ted by the way, even kings coming to
pay their respects to the chivalrous
shepherd. It was indeed a proud day
for the man of faith, and he bore him-
self with a meekness and magnanimity
worthy of him. He had the opportu-
nity, as we saw, to be both rich and
great, but he was enabled to spurn from
him the temptations of the world, and to
return to his home to be the plain man
of the country he had always been. And
let us understand that he is no ordinary
man who can rise to a great national oc-
casion, as Abraham did, and then when
he has achieved it, go back to feed sheep
and herd cattle.

Now tonight we are to speak of how
the Lord rewarded and honored his
faithful servant. He did not let him
go without his reward. He had done
his duty, done it nobly. In the name
of Jehovah he had gone forth to do
battle with the enemy in the high
places of the field, and he had triumph-
ed; and moreover the brilliant victory
he had achieved he had laid at His feet.
And he had poured into the Lord's
treasury, thus filling it to overflowing, a
generous contribution from the booty
recovered, but not one cent had gone
into his own pocket or that of any of his
people. Hence, for this special and
noble service the Lord specially and
nobly rewarded him. He who makes
the kingdom of God and His righteous-
ness a first matter shall not be in the
end a loser." After these things the
word of the Lord came unto Abram in
a vision, saying: Fear not, Abram; I am
thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.

First, Doubt and Despondency. It
would appear that almost immediately
after his return home from the battle
Abraham fell into a state of doubt and
despondency. And we need not wonder
much. You see, he had been wrought
up to a very high state of excitement,
culminating in battle with and victory
over the greatest fighting man of the
age. This high state of excitement had
been kept up night and day for weeks,
perhaps for months, all the time in fact
the conqueror and his army were in the
land, and on his return home therefore,
the reaction, alike physical, mental and
spiritual, set in, and he became weak
and despondent, querulous and wretched.
He now saw, or imagined he saw, how
unwise for his own interests and utterly
reckless he had been. By a surprise he
had indeed won a victory over the
mighty Chedorlaomer, but it might be
to him a dear-bought victory. Had he
not every reason to fear that the con-
queror would return the next year at
the latest, and take terrible vengeance
upon him for his rashness?

And then, although he had done what
he had done from the purest of motives
and with the best of intentions, out of
his love for a brother in distress, he very
well knew, that neither Lot, nor the
people of the land, had any right ap-
preciation of his heroism and self-sacrifice.
When the day of battle would
come home to him: If, and how soon it
might, they would not do for him what
he had done for them; they would not
risk their necks for him. Thus even
the good he did, or tried to do, was
thrown away upon those for whose
special benefit it was done, and consid-
ering who and what they were, it was
hardly worth the trouble.

But the question that perplexed him
most was that of the seed. He had
been ten years in the land, and he was
likely to be, a childless man. Around
him played the children of his people,
but no child of his climbed upon his
knees, and made music in his tent. And
that being so, what use was it for him
to be fighting the battles of a people and
country he had no real interest in and
that had no real interest in him and his,
and to be worrying and perplexing him-
self for others in whose veins there was
not one drop of his blood? It seemed
clear to him now, at his time of life and
that of his wife, that Eliezer of Damas-
cus, his head servant, was to be his heir,
and so looking at the whole matter, he
felt how fool-hardy it was for him to
risk so much for so little, to fight and

work and die in a cause that was none
of his. Thus the man of faith was in
great trouble, deep waters, beset all
around with doubts and fears, and the
prey of the most despondent thoughts.

And am I not perhaps addressing
some tonight, who know something of
the battle Abraham had to fight out
alone for himself in the awful darkness
that gathered in inky folds around his
soul, the battle of doubt? You tell me
that was a hard battle he and his three
hundred fought and won in the night
under the shadow of Hermon, but it was
a harder battle he had to fight after he
came home, on his knees, and with him-
self, in the night of doubt, and for a
time it went hard with him. He was
almost gone, nearer gone than we know.
There are those who know nothing, or
next to nothing, of either faith or doubt.
They live easily, carelessly, the shallow
insipid world-life that lies around their
five senses. They think not, nor deeply
feel. They have no questions to ask
beyond the here and now. It is what
they are to eat they ask about and
what to drink, and what to wear, and
when the next ball comes off, and where
the next evening party is to be. Oh
the shallowness and hollowness of such a
life! But there are those who, like Ab-
raham, live in a world of their own, a
world of thought, a spiritual world.
They hear voices that others hear not,
and see visions that others see not.
They have questions to ask that reach
out to the hereafter, and they have bat-
tles to fight that are very real and
terrible to them, that mean for them
sleepless nights, tears and groans, yea, it
may be, the loss of a kingdom.

O my hearer, you have your doubts
have them where others have none, have
them where you feel it to be so wrong to
have them. You do not want to have
them, but you have them. You think
and think, and you ask question after
question, and you are led, you know not
whither, into an awful darkness. But,
know this, doubting one, that doubt is
not a new thing in the world, nor in
Christian experience. Think not that
some strange thing has happened you.
Even the doubts that you have others
have had, and they have fought their
way into the blessed sunlight of faith
and hope, joy and peace. And think
not, again, that you are so much wiser
than others that you can doubt and
question. It is not much of an accom-
plishment to ask puzzling questions.
Almost anyone can do that. And then
to doubt is not always an evidence of
strength of mind. Rather is it an evi-
dence of mental and moral weakness.
Abraham was weak—physically, men-
tally, spiritually weak, when he fell into
doubt and darkness. He was far from
being at his best; rather indeed he was
at his worst.

Secondly, A Vision of the Night.
When Abraham was in a sad state of
doubt and despondency, the word of the
Lord came to him in a vision of the
night, and before that luminous vision
all his doubts and darkness fled away.
You have noticed, my hearer, how the
things of the night, the creatures of
darkness, haste away and hide them-
selves as soon as the sun is up. The
bats creep into their holes, the owls stop
their hooting, and the frogs their croak-
ing; the ghouls and ghosts are no longer
seen, the mists and shadows, the fogs
and frosts, withdraw. Now, as with the
natural world, so also with the super-
natural, the spiritual. The word of the
Lord breaks forth upon the world's night
like sunlight, and before it the doubts of
men flee away. The vision of the Lord
that Abraham had in his night of doubt
and despondency brought deliverance to
his soul.

And here we see how precious is the
word of truth to dispel doubts and fears.
Let the voice of the Lord ring out, let
the Bible be read and studied, and doubt
can no more abide than the darkness
and the things of darkness can abide the
light. Thomas the doubting disciple,
you remember, thought he could never
believe again, so full was he of doubt
and despondency. But no sooner had
he a vision of the risen Lord, no sooner
did he see his pierced hands and side,
and hear His voice speaking to him, than
he doubted no longer. Ah! doubting
soul, open your Bible, and let its words
speak to you in its own simple telling
way, and there will be light for you,
faith where there was doubt, gladness
and hope where there was despondency,
the real Jesus to bless and help where
ghouls and ghosts haunted the night.

The vision said to Abraham: Fear not
Abram, I am thy shield, and thy ex-
ceeding great reward. You see he was
afraid, afraid lest the mighty Chedorla-
omer might return and avenge his defeat.
But the vision made it clear that noth-
ing was to be feared from that or any

other quarter; for the Lord was his
shield. What a shield! How safe the
man when the Lord puts Himself be-
tween him and his enemies! Do you
wonder now that Chedorlaomer never
returned to Canaan to wreak his ven-
geance on Abraham? And the Lord is a
shield to all who trust in Him. Is
Jesus yours? How safe then! No fiery
darts can reach you, no sword strike,
no spear pierce; the Lord is your
shield.

I remember of reading, when a boy,
of a valiant soldier, who, in an oldtime
battle, when he saw a dart shot at his
king, flung himself in the way of it, and
so saved the king by making his body
his shield. But I read here of the king
of kings being a shield to save His peo-
ple, flinging Himself between them and
danger. You wonder that He is so
wounded—head lacerated, heart pierced,
hands torn, but that is because He has
been their shield. How battered and
torn and pierced is the shield that has
received every blow aimed at the heart
and life behind it! And thus the Lord is
our shield.

Another thing the vision said was
that the Lord Himself was Abraham's
reward: "And thy exceeding great re-
ward."

In his magnanimity he had declined
to help himself to any of the spoil he
had recovered. He had declined to do
so from a high sense of duty, honorabil-
ity. But then he had put himself out
a very great deal, risked much, all he
had in the world, made enemies, and so
on, and all for what? Nothing in the
shape of advantage or reward. The
enterprise meant so much to others, but
to himself it had been loss rather than
gain. And as he looked back over his
experience, his call from Heaven, and
his wanderings from place to place, it
seemed to him that it was loss, sacrifice,
every step he took. He was therefore
inclined in his disappointment and chag-
rin to find fault with his hard lot, and
cry out against the injustice and impar-
tiality of the ways of Providence, so
far as he was concerned. But the Lord
said to him that He Himself was His
reward, and He would be a reward
worthy of all he had done and suffered
in His service. "I am thy shield and
thy exceeding great reward."

After all money is no proper reward
for faithful service, for devotion to the
truth, for the great good work Abrah-
am's faith had wrought out. There is
a usefulness you cannot buy with money,
a usefulness dollars—thousands of them
—cannot pay for. Such was Abraham
to the world of his own time and all
time, such his faith and life-work, that
only God himself could reward him, and
that only by Himself. "I am... thy ex-
ceeding great reward."

But his childlessness was the one
great stumbling-block in the way of his
faith, in fact, in the way of everything.

"O Lord God," he cried out in the
bitterness of his spirit, "what wilt thou
give me seeing I go childless?" There is
always some great lack in the fullest life,
some emptiness in the best-filled home.
And, no child was that lack in the tent
under the oaks of Mamre, and such was
that lack that nothing else could take
the place of it. A great blessed promise
was made him, but it was so linked with
"the seed," that without the seed the
promise fell to the ground, and there
was no seed. "Behold to me thou hast
given no seed; and lo! one born in mine
house is mine heir."

And then the vision cleared up the
matter to him, declaring that the seed
was to be his own child, not simply one
born in his house. "This man shall not
be thine heir," said the word of the Lord
that came to him in vision, "but he that
shall come forth out of thine own bowels
shall be thine heir." And then he was
led out of his tent, and from under the
shady oak-grove, to where he had a
splendid view of the star-bespangled
heavens. It was a glorious night, the
dome of Heaven strewn as thick with
stars as the sea shore with sand, and he
was told to look: "Look now toward
Heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be
able to tell them, and he said unto him:
'So shall thy seed be.'" And Abraham
believed the word of the Lord, believed
as he had not believed it before, and
there came to him, out in the lonely
night came to that childless man, and
unspeakable comfort and peace, and, in a
very real sense, because of his faith, he
enjoyed a blessed foretaste of the glad-
far-off good to be. "And he believed in
the Lord, and He counted it to him for
righteousness."

Thirdly, Jehovah's Covenant with
Abraham. A covenant is between two
parties, and the two parties here are Ab-
raham and Jehovah. A covenant may
be defined as a sort of sacred bargain or
agreement. It was a blessed conde-

scension on the part of God to the weak-
nesses of men. It was putting Himself
low down on the plane of human infir-
mity where His creature could treat with
him in a sort of give-and-take manner.
It was binding himself as a man binds
himself to be faithful, to keep his word
and be true to His promise, just as if
God needed, as men need, oaths and
seals and signatures, to confirm and
ratify what He says and does.

Abraham had asked to have the prom-
ise confirmed, "O Lord God," he said,
whereby shall I know that I shall in-
herit it? And then the Lord set him
to work to prepare an old-time covenant-
sacrifice. He was to take a three-year-
old or full-grown heifer, a three-year old
she-goat, and a three-year old ram.
Also a turtle dove and a young
pigeon. The three animals he was
to kill and divide lengthwise into
two pieces, putting the halves opposite
one another, and far enough apart for a
person to walk between and among the
pieces. The birds were not to be
divided, but to be laid opposite one
another. There were thus four pairs of
parts. This Abraham did in the early
morning. He then sat down beside
his sacrifice and waited for the Lord to
do His part. I suppose he would, with
due solemnity, walk between the pieces
himself. But instead of the Lord's
coming to walk between the pieces as
he had done, or was ready to do, carrion
fowls came flying to mar and devour
his sacrifice. But as often as they came
Abraham drove them away. The hours
passed wearily, but the man of faith
watched on. The hot summer sun beat
down upon his uncovered head all the
day, but he was faithful to his watch
not leaving it for a single moment. If
he should have left it, left it for any
cause whatever, left it for food and rest,
or if he should have been unwatchful
just then the Lord might come and he
would miss the good and glory of His
blessed coming, or the croaking fowls
might come and in one half hour ut-
terly mar his sacrifice. So the faithful
Abraham watched on through the ling-
ering hours; on his knees he watched
and waited in payer and faith, and not
in vain he thus watched.

Ah! my hearer, how Abraham's faith-
fulness and patience beside his sacrifice
rebuke our unwatchfulness and restless-
ness. If the sermon is longer than usual,
if we are kept ten minutes beyond the
hour for worship, we think we are im-
posed on, and we are restless and im-
patient. And sometimes, instead of
watching wide awake and attentive and
earnest, we nod, we sleep, and so miss
the Lord's coming. The fowls come to
prey upon our sacrifice; they come in the
shape of world-thoughts, inattention,
drowsiness, whispers and winks, and so
much else that is not seemly in the
House of God, and we do not drive them
away. On the contrary, we let them
come, invite them perhaps, and with
beak and talon, they make a sad mess of
our worship. And then so often we
stay away altogether. The day the
Lord comes in power to bless, we are not
there. The weather is unpropitious, or
we are tired with the work and worry
of Saturday, and so we do not feel like
it, and we come not to the altar. Is it
any wonder, then, that so many come
and go unblessed, unsaved? Ah! if we would
do our work, attend to business, as we do
our worship, there would not be much for us.
Let us learn a lesson on the way to worship from
Abraham's watch beside his sacrifice.

The day wore on to its close, and still
the Lord had not come. The sun went down.
All the land was dark. The birds of prey had gone
to roost. And the patriarch waited on. The
thought would come to him perhaps that he was
the plaything of some spite, the jest of some
wild fancy of his own. But he waited on, and
as he waited he slept. He had been up much
of the night before, and all the long day he had
waited and watched, and we can hardly wonder
that the weary watcher slept in spite of
himself. Perhaps he struggled hard against it
as an evil thing, a weakness, a temptation of
the devil. But the Lord gives his beloved sleep,
and Abraham's sleep was from the Lord, a deep
sweet sleep. But though his eyes were closed,
his soul was wide awake, and the Lord came to
him in his sleep, and what a blessed sleep! The
Lord came and in His own mysterious way
passed between the pieces, and so ratified the
covenant. "And it came to pass, that when
the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a
smoking furnace, and a flaming torch that
passed between these pieces."

And then the Lord made known to him some
of the far-off future. He was to die, but his
seed was to be a nation in the years to come,
and they would experience centuries of oppres-
sion, but out of it they would rise to reign.
Thus it was worth while waiting and watching
for such a vision.

And here let us learn, as we close, that it is
not in vain we wait on God beside his altar.
He may seem to be long in coming and to de-
light in keeping us waiting; but He will come,
and when He comes He will bless us. The Lord
is not slack in fulfilling His word. Let us there-
fore be more faithful than ever at the altar,
more attentive at His House, more watchful in
prayer.

And how good it is to make a covenant with
the Lord to be His and to have Him as ours. On
Friday night there is to be the privilege of cov-
enant-making here, and at His own Table next
Lord's Day morning. Who will come, then,
and solemnly declare themselves to be on the
Lord's side? Let us feel it to be a privilege,
and avail ourselves of it, and thus be blessed
with faithful Abraham. May many thus come.