

Trust and Obey

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[0 : 00] Bibles with you, please open them up to Genesis chapter 12. Well, this morning in Sunday school, we were looking at Paul's letter to the church at Colossae, and one of the things that we heard there is just how excited and thankful Paul was that the church there were people of faith and love.

And as a church here in Davidson, that's what we want to be known for too. We want to be known for our faith in Jesus Christ and our love not only for one another, but for people outside of our church, in our community.

And this morning marks the start of a new series of messages, and faith is very much going to be one of the central themes of this series.

Time and time again, the apostles, they would point back in their letters to the stories of men of faith in the Old Testament and hold them up as examples to follow.

And so there's a lot that we can learn from some of the stories in the Old Testament about what it means to actually have faith and live by faith in Jesus.

[1 : 34] And so for the next number of weeks, we're going to be looking at the story of Abraham. He's kind of the, some have said, the father of our faith.

We're going to be digging into his story and understanding what God has to say to us through his life. In Paul's letter to, to the church at Rome, he said this, for everything that was written in the past was written to teach us so that through the endurance taught in the scriptures and the encouragement they provide, we might have hope.

He also wrote to Timothy and encouraged him to hold fast to the Old Testament scriptures. He said, because they are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

They're able to equip you for every good work. And so as we look back on this story of Abraham, we are looking to see how the Lord will use that to equip us for every good work and to teach us about what it means to live and to walk by faith.

Genesis 12 verse 1 begins this way. The Lord said to Abram. It's kind of an interesting thing that all of a sudden in this story, we go, we go right into dialogue.

[3 : 09] We go right into a conversation between the Lord and Abram. And part of the reason that's surprising is because of what comes before this in Genesis.

Moses has written and told us about the creation of the world. He's then gone on to describe the rebellion and how God, he gave a command and humanity, our first parents, broke that command. They rebelled against him. Sin entered the world. Corruption entered the world. After that, he moved on to describe how things got worse and worse and worse and worse.

All kinds of evil abounding to the point where God sent a flood to destroy almost everyone except Noah and his family.

It was kind of a bit of a restart there with Noah and his family. And then from there, Noah was a righteous man. And so we would hope that it would kind of begin to trend in the right direction and things would go well.

[4 : 18] But it began to spiral downward again. People just kind of living according to the sin in their hearts, their own selfish desires, holding sway until they hit another low point, another kind of global event, the Tower of Babel, where in pride they sought to exalt themselves rather than God and build this great tower, a place of worship, but not to the Lord.

And it was there that the Lord confused their languages and they were scattered over the face of the earth. And so, so far in this story, it's been big events.

It's been worldwide events. And then almost out of nowhere, Moses focuses in on this one guy, Abraham.

Abraham was what he went by back then. And we're kind of left to wonder, why Abraham? Who is this guy?

Moses gives us a little bit of detail here. He kind of traces Abraham's lineage down from Shem, one of the sons of Noah. Abraham was Shem's great, great, great, great, great, great, great grandfather.

[5 : 49] And, or sorry, Shem was Abraham's great times seven grandfather. The lifespan of people was still kind of working its way down from up in the 900s in the days of Noah.

And so Shem was actually alive at the same time as Abram was born. Noah actually only died about 42 years before Abram was born, which is pretty amazing.

He traces his lineage and he tells us just a little bit about Abram and his family. Abram had a dad named Terah and he had two brothers.

And they lived together in a city called Ur. And Ur is kind of along the Euphrates River. It's in modern day Iraq.

It's kind of, I think, 300 kilometers southeast of Baghdad towards the Persian Gulf. We've actually found the ruins of what was there.

[6 : 52] And there's been quite a lot of excavation and archaeology kind of work done there. That's where Abram grew up with his father and his brothers.

And Moses gives us two key details about Abram's family. His brother, he died at an early age and he kind of left a son, Lot.

Lot's going to be a part of this story, as we'll see. Another key detail, however, is that Abram's wife, Sarai, is barren.

She's not able to conceive and bear children. And this is really all that we know about Abram until we come to chapter 12 of Genesis here.

Stephen, later on, many years later, thousands of years later in the New Testament, as he's telling the story about Abraham, this is what he said.

[7 : 55] He said, And so this, what we're going to read this morning is the account of what happened in that moment when the Lord, the God of glory, the one who created the world and everything in it, appeared to Abraham.

Genesis 12, verse 1. The Lord said to Abraham, Go from your country, your people, and your father's household to the land I will show you.

The first thing that the Lord says to Abraham is a command. It's a directive. Go. Leave your country, Babylonia, ancient Babylonia.

Leave your people. Your clan, your relatives, your extended family, the city of Ur. Leave that all behind and go to the land that I will show you.

Now imagine for a moment what that would have been like. I mean, imagine that here you are, modern times. Let's say you're in your bedroom, making your bed.

[9 : 19] And then all of a sudden, the God of glory appears to you. And we don't know what that was like for Abraham. It doesn't tell us what he saw, what he experienced in that moment.

But the God of glory appears to you, Yahweh, the Lord. And he says, Go. I want you to pack your bags, load up your moving truck, and leave your country.

Leave Canada, Saskatchewan, Davidson, and go to the land I will show you. Wow. Wow. Wow.

That's quite the thing to ask of someone. It's quite the thing to expect that if you ask someone to do that, they'll actually do it. Unless, of course, you are the Lord of glory.

God says, Go to the land I will show you. He doesn't even tell him where he's going. The destination is not clear.

[10 : 30] And so you can imagine Abraham as he's thinking about this. How do I prepare for this? How do I pack for this? What do I put in the suitcase?

I mean, this is not just like a trip to Hawaii for a vacation. You know, pack my sandals, pack my sunscreen, and that kind of stuff.

He has no idea where he's going. All he knows is he's going out of country, which is far away. So we're going to need some heavy-duty pulling animals and equipment and carts.

We're going to, who knows how long this is going to be. We're going to need some tents. This is a big deal. To leave it all behind. Move and go.

And yet, not even a hint is to where in this moment. But in those words, to the land I will show you, there's also a faint whisper, a faint promise of an ongoing relationship with the Lord.

[11 : 39] This is not just going to be a one-moment thing. Just do what I want you to do, and then never hear from the Lord again. No, go to the land I will show you.

At a future time, I will appear to you again. I will speak to you again. I will show you where to go. And there's more.

The Lord goes on. He says, I will make you into a great nation. And I will bless you. I will make your name great.

And you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you. And whoever curses you, I will curse. And all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

Wow. Wow. What a thing to have said to you by the Lord of glory. I mean, even just think for a moment of how this story has gone so far.

[12 : 50] Humanity has rebelled against the Lord. It got so bad that he wiped almost everybody out with a flood and restarted.

And then it got bad again all the way down to the Tower of Babel. And it's continuing in that direction. This is kind of the last thing that we expect to read. God appears to a man and says, not I will punish you.

Not the gavel is coming down upon you. This is enough. But I want to bless you. I want to bless your socks off.

I'm going to make you into a great nation. And not only that. At the end, he says, all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

Maybe the story of this one man that seems to come out of nowhere actually has more to do with this big story of the world than we originally thought.

[13 : 57] What an unexpected mercy and gift of grace in a world that is spiraling downward and out of control.

God promises seven things. Seven statements he makes. I will make you into a great nation. What a thing to promise. I'm going to make you into a whole country.

a great country. And not just an average country. A great one. I will bless you. I will put my special favor on your life.

I will make your name great. I'm going to make you famous in the best way so that you're revered and you're respected among all the people.

Verse 3. I will bless those who bless you, Abraham. And I will curse whoever curses you.

[15 : 08] Just in case anybody would come and threaten what I've promised to you, I'll deal with them. I'll be against them if they're against you. You'll be under my watch, my care, my protection.

And if they're for you, then I'll bless them. What an amazing thing to promise to a person. And finally, you will be a blessing.

All peoples on earth will be blessed through you. As good as all these things are, Abraham, this is not just about you.

My plan and my purpose is to bless all the families of the earth through you. That's the last thing that I was expecting to hear out of the mouth of the Lord after everything that came before this.

I want to bless. I want to be gracious. I want to show my kindness and goodness to this world of people who are sinning and rebelling against me.

[16 : 20] Not just a few people, not just you, Abraham, but all the families of the earth. Worldwide. What an amazing promise.

So would you do it? Would you pack it all up, load up the moving truck, and leave your country after hearing this?

Verse four. So Abram went as the Lord had told him. And Lot went with him. Abram was 75 years old when he set out from Haran.

He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan. And they arrived there.

There's a bit of a timing issue here. You kind of hear that with the story of Haran. But basically, some of this is made up for in chapter 11. Abram was called by God when he was in Ur.

[17 : 26] He packed up, and he decided to go. And his dad actually decided to go with him, Tara. And Lot came as well. They traveled 1,000 kilometers northwest along the Euphrates River.

And remember, they weren't flying, they weren't driving. They were walking, or they were on animals. They were packing major with this caravan here. They came to a city called Haran, which is kind of the southern border of Turkey.

Abram's dad, Tara, decided he's going to stay there. They settled there for a little while, and then probably the Lord appeared to Abram again and encouraged him, it's time to go.

It's time to move on to the land that I promised to you. And so Abram leaves his dad, Tara, literally he leaves his father's household. He takes Lot with him, along with all that they had accumulated while they were in Haran already.

The Lord is beginning to prosper, Abram, and bless him. And they go down into the land of Canaan. The land of Canaan, of course, is called that because Canaan, the grandson of Noah, his descendants, had settled in that region.

[18:42] And Moses tells us that Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Morah at Shechem. At that time, the Canaanites were in the land.

The Lord appeared to Abram and said, To your offspring, I will give this land. So he built an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to him.

So yes, Abraham did what the Lord told him to do. He just kind of simply accepted, Yes, you'll show me where to go.

And he moved all the way from Ur, thousands of kilometers, around the Fertile Crescent into Canaan. Can you imagine what he must have been feeling as he kind of rolled into town?

People there are kind of like, Who are you? Nobody, you're not related to anybody I know. You know, like, Man, this guy looks like he's come from a long ways away.

[19:47] Who's your grandfather? Who's your, you know? He's a foreigner. He walks into the land of Canaan. He goes to a town called Shechem, which is kind of partway into Israel, or the land of Canaan as it was known.

And the Lord appears to him again. Verse 7. The Lord says to Abraham, To your offspring, literally, to your seed, to your offspring, I will give this land.

I mean, think about that. Just to put this into perspective, it's maybe not the same size of land, but imagine that you walked into Montana, and the Lord appeared to you and said, I'm going to give this land to you and to your offspring.

Like, what? Just before this, Moses has already made it quite clear that at that time, the Canaanites were in the land.

This land is occupied. It belongs to someone else. Abraham's here as a foreigner. Here he is, sitting in his tent. And the Lord says to him, I'm going to give this land to your offspring.

[21:16] You've got to wonder what was going on in Abraham's mind as he heard that. Like, how? How are you going to do that? When is this going to happen? Like, that's crazy.

And yet, that's what the Lord promised. And it seems that Abraham just took his word for it. He responded. He built an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to them.

He worshipped the Lord. From there, he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east.

There he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord. Then Abraham set out and continued toward the Negev. So Abraham's working his way southward through the land of Canaan.

He's getting the lay of the land. He's kind of going towards the southernmost boundary, the desert. And all this time, this promise is rolling around in his head.

[22:17] To your offspring, I will give this land. When he comes down to this second place near Bethel where he pitches his tent, it says, he built an altar to the Lord there and he called on the name of the Lord.

This is a two-way relationship between Abraham and the Lord. It's not just the Lord appears, gives instructions, and then Abraham doesn't hear from him for a long time and wonders, well, what's going on?

No, Abraham, this is two-way. This time, in the second place, he camps. Abraham, he builds an altar and he calls on the name of the Lord. What do I do? Where do I go?

Where do I settle in this land? We don't know exactly what he asked of God. But this is a two-way relationship.

Which kind of brings us to this big question that is kind of, I hope, bubbling under the surface for all of us of why Abraham? Out of all the people on earth, why does God pick Abram?

[23:30] As one of my favorite commentators, Dale Ralph Davis, says, we kind of have this stereotype of Abraham. We see him as this kind, grandfatherly old man with a long beard.

God probably chose him because of how righteous he was, just like Noah. But the surprising thing is that this is not the picture of Abraham that the Bible gives us.

In fact, there's indications that it's the opposite. Joshua, much later in the story, as he's reminding the people of Israel of where they got their start, he said this, he said, long ago your ancestors, including Terah, the father of Abraham, and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates River and worshipped other gods.

Did you catch that? Abraham was not a devout, righteous, God-fearing man. Not at the start. He worshipped other gods.

They've even dug up some of the remains of the ziggurat that was at Ur. It's kind of like a temple-y kind of tower thingy where they worshipped Nana, the moon god.

[24 : 52] That's where Abraham and his family had their start. And so why Abraham? This guy who's a sinner like all of us as we're about to find out who worshipped other gods.

Why Abraham? This is the amazing thing is there's no reason given. It doesn't say. It certainly doesn't seem to be because he was good, he was righteous.

Probably the closest that we get to an answer is what the Lord says to Moses 400 years later. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

Some of us might wonder well it doesn't seem fair that God chose him and not others. But remember the promises that have been made to Abraham are not just for Abraham.

through this one man God intends to bless all the families of the earth and he has the freedom he's God to decide how this this plan is going to unfold and who it's going to begin with.

[26 : 21] This story is about the faith and obedience of one man but it's about even more than that. It's about a God who has this incredible and deep unexpected surprising love and mercy towards the people he has made sinful though they are.

It's about the Lord Yahweh the God who shows up and just makes promises like that to nobodies for no apparent reason.

What an amazing gracious unexpected surprising love and mercy he has. As we hear these promises we're wondering well how's the Lord going to do this?

How's he going to keep these promises and if we're honest probably even with all the revelation we have today filled out in the rest of the pages of our Bible we're still kind of wondering how does this work out?

We're going to come back to these promises again and again and look at that but for today for this Sunday I want us to just think about what Abraham is thinking and seeing through his eyes.

[27 : 53] He doesn't know. He has no clue how God's going to do this. I mean that would take a miracle to make you into a great nation to give you this land that's occupied by all these other people and as we're going to see in the weeks ahead these promises they stretch and reach even further than Abraham probably ever imagined or thought that they would.

And so where does this story speak to us today? I mean Abraham he's he's an ancient guy. Here we are in 2019 in Davidson Saskatchewan.

What does the Lord have for us through the story of Abraham? In many ways there's a lot of similarities between us and Abraham.

Just like Abraham we don't know the future. We don't know what's coming. God doesn't always tell us this is where you're going.

This is how it's going to turn out. But inside that God also has an invitation not just to Abraham but to us for that ongoing relationship characterized by faith characterized by trust.

[29 : 30] We too like Abraham have received the word of God. It hasn't come in the same way as Abraham got it but we have here the words of God and in some ways we even have an upgrade over Abraham we have all this extra stuff we have the words of Moses in the law we have the word of the prophets that help us see just how sinful we really are.

We have the story of Jesus which helps us to see despite the fact that we're sinners just how loved we are by what Christ came into our world to do for us Abraham was promised some pretty amazing things but we too have some amazing promises given to us by God to look forward to and so here at the beginning of Abraham's story I think the simple question that we're all left with is what will we do in our lives in our situations with the unknowns that we have with the words that God has given to us will we do what Abraham did and simply trust and obey do what the Lord has asked us

to do there's all kinds of ways that this this really hits the road and this seems to be where the New Testament writers point us to the author of Hebrews said this he said by faith Abraham when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance he obeyed and went even though he did not know where he was going we're meant to look at him as an example how does this show up in our lives it shows up in all kinds of ways we've been talking about the election coming up we've been talking with some of you about just how things are not going the way that we want them to in our world there's things that are happening our world has a different view of how we should respond to authority it has a different view of sexuality there's all these number of issues there's all these voices that just kind of clamor and weigh in this is what you should think this is what you should believe perhaps it was the same for Abraham rolling into Canaan oh you're worshipping who we don't do that around here you know that that ancient

God Yahweh who's that the question is whose voice are we going to listen to whose voice are we going to trust and obey the voices that we hear around us or the voice of the Lord of glory who has spoken to us and at times it's not easy often times we're tempted to make excuses we don't read about Abraham making excuses and why he shouldn't go why he shouldn't make the trip but we do that you know if I if I if I don't speed I'm going to be late fill in the blank well if I give to that thing then I'm not going to have enough money left for fill in the blank if I if I don't just if I hadn't twisted the truth just a little bit in this conversation then fill in the blank all kinds of ways all kinds of situations but what we learn from

Abraham is that despite how we feel or what we see or what we understand of the situation however impossible it may be what we need to do is simply trust the Lord of glory and obey his word in the words of my one of my favorite musicians get up off your seat move your feet just do what he says let's pray father father we don't want to be hasty to move beyond these words in this moment you are the lord of glory and so right now in these moments we want to call on you just as Abram did we want to invite you to direct the story of our lives we thank you for the details that you withheld from us on purpose so that we would draw near to you so that we could have a relationship with you teach us what it means to live by faith reveal yourself to us in a deeper way as we go on this journey through

[34 : 43] Abram's story we pray and ask this in Jesus name amen