

PM Ephesians 3:14-21 Praying with Paul

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 16 March 2025

Preacher: Dr Neil Macdonald

- [0:01] So, a question before we start looking at this passage this morning. Are we prepared for new beginnings? Are we prepared for new beginnings?
- Are we prepared for the challenges of life and how that may affect the demands that God places upon us? We read here in the passage of Abraham, a man whose life was about to be radically changed.
- He had been staying in Haran with his family and his kin. They seemed to have a reasonably comfortable life.
- They had servants, they had cattle, they had sheep. And then, one day, he's called to leave everything behind.
- To go, goodness knows where, to follow his God. Many of us would probably have sat down and maybe have wrote a list of pros and cons.
- [1:14] Of course, I want to follow my God. But what's going to be the real cost of that? And is the cost of it going to match up to the promises that God makes to us?
- Or is the cost going to be too high? But not Abraham. Abraham seems to say his farewells to family and kin and sets out on a journey with God.
- Going to goodness knows where and knowing not what lies ahead of him. He's a man who has the same hopes and fears as us.
- If he's a young man, he would have feared how life would go for him. Would he get married? Would he have a family? Would he be able to provide?
- As the years went on, he could see his wealth grow and he could become comfortable in his life. But he also would still have fears about how he would have an heir.
- [2:28] After all, we learn in the passage that he's 75 years old and he's called by God. And he has no children.
- So he has all the worries and all the expectations that we have as we go through the different stages of life. This morning we'll look briefly at three aspects of Abraham's life.
- The fact is that by faith he goes out and follows his God and his new beginnings. We see that there are blessings for Abraham and his family.
- At this stage, those blessings are in the form of promises. But as we go later into Abraham's life, we see those promises fulfilled.
- He has a son in Isaac. Although even he was starting to wonder if it would ever happen. Given at this point, he was 100. And his wife Sarah was 80.
- [3:38] But God fulfills his promises. And we also see in the final verses of the passage that Abraham becomes a builder of praise to God.
- We see how he keeps his focus on God who called him to run on journey. And how he built monuments to his praise and glory.
- So what do you think of when we talk about Genesis? What's the first thing that springs to mind? Is it the story of creation?

Is it the story of Adam and Eve and their fall from the right relationship with God? Is it about Noah and the remarkable salvation that he has as he obeys God and builds an ark?

Is it about Abraham and his journey from healing? Or is it about Joseph, sold into slavery, rises to become almost the second most important person in Egypt and feeds the people in the time of Adam?

[4:53] Whatever the story that springs to mind when we think of Genesis, it's the story of new beginnings. The fact that our lives are not controlled by where we are today.

Our lives are controlled by God. And when we accept Christ as our saviour, our lives change forever. We have new beginnings.

Something that all the stories in Genesis have in common. There's new beginnings and the centrality of God in those new beginnings. They don't happen because man decided to do something.

They happen because God decided to do something. Think of Genesis 1.1. The very first verse in the Bible.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. It starts with the story of God's actions. And the whole Bible, right to its very end, is based on God's actions.

[6:05] And his love for the people that he created. It begins with God's acts of creation. And it reminds us that he existed before creation.

And he exists today. He was not created himself. He was, is, and always shall be. What a thought and what security we can take from that.

He wasn't created. He's the one who was, is, and always will be. The one who's unchanging. And whose love for us will never depart from us.

He's a God who speaks. And as he brings forth, as he speaks, he brings forth his creation. And he's a God who today still communicates with us.

He didn't create us on earth, wind it up and step back. He is still with us today. He still talks to us.

[7:13] It's the centrality of prayer that we take our needs and our fears and our desires. And also repentance of our wrongdoings to him in prayer.

But also at times we have to be silent and give him a chance to answer back to us. To guide us through life. And to read the scriptures to see what he desires of us.

God desires to communicate with us. And that is something that has been unchanging. Since the day that he first created Adam and Eve.

To this very morning. Scripture is clear that creation did not result from a series of fortuitous events.

Or scientific accidents. It was the work of a living and personal God. Who brought all things into being. And it's the same God that calls us to himself today.

[8:20] In the beginning, God had made all things good. Read it. In Genesis 1. At each stage of creation, all that was created was good.

It was man who corrupted it. God had made it that we would walk with him. We would follow his ways and tend to all that he had created.

He had given us power over all things. But we went our own way. He gave us one command of what we were not to do. And what did we do?

We decided to go our own way and do the very thing that he had forbid us. So man corrupted God's creation.

Man was made to serve God and to live with him. But we decided that we would turn us back.

- [9:20] But God didn't end the story there and simply decide that he would scrub us out and try again. Rather, he decided right from that moment that Adam and Eve sinned against him. That he would bring a redeemer. Who would aid us to return to a right relationship with God. And that redeemer was his son, our Lord Jesus Christ.
- Through him, we have a new beginning and a promise of salvation. If we accept him as our saviour. Yet, the story of the Bible is one of man striving to also try to please God by his own actions.
- By interpreting God's laws for his benefits. And rejecting Jesus Christ, the one that God sent as a saviour.
- Think about it. Think of those examples we gave. Even before Abraham with Noah.
- [10:39] God had become so fed up with the sin of man. His corruption and how he turned his back in God. That he decided to bring in judgment on man.
- But he seemed that Noah was righteous. And Noah had followed his ways. So he had a plan to save Noah and his family by building an ark.
- And Noah followed in God's commands. You can imagine. The mockery he may have taken. The ridicule he may have got.
- The Lord. We learn that as Noah built the ark. People still went on with their lives as normal. They got married. They had children.
- They did business. And you can imagine them saying. Noah, what are you building that for? One, it will never float. And two, they're never going to need it. Life goes on as normal. Everything's fine.
- [11:39] But came the flood. And man perished. But Noah and his family were safe in the ark.
- The flood receded. And the ark grounded itself. Noah and his family and the animals come out from the ark and repopulate the earth.
- So here we can see that earth and man was blessed by God. That he had the chance to start again.
- To start afresh. And yet, what do we see? We see that man's desires. That man's heart was not truly in God.
- And that through time, man goes back to his old ways. Evermore distant from God. It may surprise us.
- [12:40] You would think that having that experience, people would want to walk, continue to walk in the way of God. And to give him praise. But in Genesis 8.21, we learn that God knew it.
- Not just the actions of man that he's seen. But he knew man's heart. And it says, For the intentions of man's heart is evil from his youth. God knew at that stage.
- As he'd known from the very beginning, that man would go his own way. Because his heart wasn't truly focused on God. God knows us.
- He knows the actions we do. And he also knows the thoughts in our heads. He knows us. He cares for us. He cares for us. And despite our wrongdoing and our sins against him, he still loves us and cares for us.
- God calls us to him through his son. But too often, we hear the message, but continue in our own ways.
- [13:42] How many times do people hear the gospel preached?
- And how many times do they say, Yeah, good story. There are more people there to live by, but thank you very much. I'll go on with my life.

How often do people hear the story? Decide that, I'll maybe get that wee go. Sounds good.

And then when the going gets tough, and life gets difficult, well, actually, I was doing okay in life. I'll just go back to my own ways. Unfortunately, the story is the same today as it always has been.

400 years after Noah, God decides that he will call out Abraham to have a new beginning, to once more call out people to himself who could honor him and be a witness for him.

[14:50] Unfortunately, it doesn't work out quite the same. We think of our governments. They talk about leveling up, about making things equal across society and having a redistribution of wealth so that all can have all that they require and so everyone's life can improve.

And that is a good moral ideal. It's good rational thinking. But we find that man tends to level things down.

But rather than raising each other up, we go to the lowest common denominator. If we think back to the story of Noah, we think that after the blessings that Noah and his family had, they would want to stay in God's ways.

But we see that rather, that they go back to their old ways. We think it would be dead easy that if somebody starts to stray in life, that the others say, whoa, stop, stop, stop, stop.

Remember what happened to our forefathers. Remember how we were blessed. Remember the promises we have from God. But no, they go their own way and seem to draw more and more people into it.

[16:14] And people come more and more distant from God. God was merciful to them. God showed them love. God showed a heart that cared for them.

But they still desired to go their old ways. So, here we have Abraham, once more, being called out. God making a new people to give him praise and to witness to the rest of the world.

In verse 1 we read, Now the Lord said to Abraham, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. Abraham is called out from the world.

And there's a challenge that will bring him hardship. Think of right from point one. He's commanded to leave his family. To leave the security of his life.

And he's ready. He's to ready himself for a journey. To goodness knows where. Think about it.

[17:28] If there's times where we have had to leave family for work or to go to a far off place evening holiday, how do you feel? You've got the excitement of something new happening.

But how do you feel when you're having to leave people behind? There's a certain feeling of loss as you depart. Think how Abraham felt going out into the unknown.

Possibly never to see his family again. But it's only by letting go of his material security that Abraham can show his faith in God.

That he can show his plan his faith in God's plan for him. Because if we're not prepared to let go of our old life before we knew Christ how can we ever show faith that Christ has a new life in store for us?

Think of a bird in the nest. The bird remains the young bird in the nest remains in its nest and is constantly fed by its parents.

[18:43] It never ever feels the excitement or the thrill of flight. It never experiences that first emotion of fear and of exuberance as it takes a step from the security of the nest into the air flaps its wings and soars.

If we cling to the material things of this world and we rely on the material things of this world we will never know Christ in his fullness if we can know him at all.

Because we will always be relying on ourselves and what we can do rather than in God or God's promises to us.

Now we may not be called to give up our homes we may not be called to give up our families but we are called to think about the role we play in society.

to think about the activities that we are involved in and are we appropriate for our Christian lives. I'm not saying here that we have to become isolationists.

[19:59] That's not good for us physically or mentally and it does not allow us to witness for Jesus as our saviour. We are called to be both in the world but not of the world.

we are called to work in the world to play in the world to associate with the world but we are called to be different.

We are called to stand for what Christ has done for us on the cross in Calvary to allow the Spirit of the Holy Spirit to transform our lives and to be a witness to all whom we meet.

and think of many people through the years some famous some not so famous who have to take that step of faith to give up their old life and all that was important to them to cling to new life in our Lord Jesus Christ.

yesterday I was watching the Six Nations I was watching Scotland v Wales some of you that know me it's not surprising I was watching the rugby and it brought to mind the story of Ewan Murray you don't need to go into rugby to understand the story but Ewan Murray was a young prop who played for Scotland so a successful rugby player brought up in a Christian home he knew the scriptures he knew the gospel message and he was accepting all that and on occasions he would go to church and if you had probably asked him he would probably say yeah I'm a Christian and he had a successful rugby career then one day he started to question things but was still not sure what he was really questioning then he's out in the rugby field he has a tackle and he has a seizure he wakes up in a hospital bed to find out that he'd almost died so he then starts thinking about the purpose of life and somebody spoke to him within his family about

[22:36] Christ he thought well I know the good news story I know the story of salvation I go to church and that's fine so he had the head knowledge then it came to him it was one thing to have the head knowledge it was one thing to know about Christ it was another thing to experience Christ and he accepted Christ as the saviour so he also had to start thinking about how his life had to change now you might think given the sport of rugby it might be appropriate to think well is it really that Christian an environment is it an environment that really a Christian can grow and witness for others and there's some

Christians I know people who have come to Christ and have given up rugby and that's fine but Ewan Murray decided no I'm gifted and this is a talent that I have but I'm not going to play rugby on a Sunday anymore if I'm going to honour God I have to honour him with all my heart and with all my mind and I have to as far as I can follow his command his commandments tell us to keep Sabbath holy there's a day that we set aside for God's praise and God's glory so he decided that he would no longer play on a Sunday think how nerve wracking that must be the next time he's speaking to his coaches and he says I really want to come back and play that's me being past fit by the doctors etc but I'm no longer going to play on a Sunday imagine walking into a dressing room where there's a whole load of testosterone and masculinity some of it toxic and saying sorry lads but next week we're playing on Sunday and I'm not playing sometimes it's nerve wracking but the promises of God are worth anything that we can lose in this world and the amazing thing actually was just like

Abraham Ewan Murray was blessed he went on to a successful career where his playing colleagues accepted that he would no longer play on a Sunday they didn't mock him they didn't ridicule him but he was blessed to continue his career for a good number of years and become the most capped Scottish prop he also had the opportunity to witness directly an environment where God was often missing what hope what opportunity a step of faith can give and we see in the final part in verses 7 and 8 we see how Abraham also becomes a builder of his faith and of praise to God then the

Lord appeared to Abraham and said to your offspring I will give this land so he built there an altar to the Lord who appeared to him from there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and the A on the east and there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord so we see how Abraham doesn't simply follow God's commands for him how he doesn't just blindly walk through the desert in the wilderness in the hope of something coming but rather when he sees the land before him he sets forward his praise for the Lord we see how he builds that new nation and that new people he bases it on his worship of God think how do you how would you build a new site if you were going to build a house what do you do you look at the site that lies before you you think about all the services you're going to require so where's the shelter bit on the site where is the water where's the electricity what's the easiest way to lay it to where

I want to plan my house Noah does the same he walks through the land he sees all that God has given him he assesses the ground he thinks about where he is going to settle and at each stage he gives praise to God and raises an altar to God's glory so today we have the same opportunities we have the same chance to walk like Abraham in God's ways to go out in faith faith and for some it will mean great sacrifices I remember my time in Nepal and speaking to people there and the cost of their faith if you're a Hindu in Nepal or in India and you come to faith in the

[29:01] Lord Jesus Christ you face outcasts from your family you face the possibility of losing your job and being homeless and not just homeless but cast out of your village because you're seeing this and turned your back in all that is important to the people of that village and in occasions it's even led to the loss of lives where people have been beaten and even killed for their faith in Christ we don't have to face those same traumatic events but it can be challenging but we have to have the faith of Abraham to step out in the unknown because Jesus tells us in Matthew 28 that as we step out and take our message to the world that he is with us always to the end of the age we are never forsaken we are never on our own in times of difficulty when we feel as though we are alone that's more about our doubt and our fears than it is about

God God is always with us he goes before us and walks beside us so with that certainty as we go forward into the next week do we walk forward in faith in God or do we walk forward in the hope of man do we desire to serve God or do we choose to follow man's promises man's promises which if they're ever fulfilled are but for a fleeting moment work hard and you can have a bigger house work hard and you can have a new car work hard and you can have anything you want but the only thing is when you set your eyes on that new house your family gets bigger you need a bigger house then your family departs and you need to get a smaller house but you work hard and you earn monies and you get that car five ten years time you need a new car the rewards of this world are fleeting but we have a

God who promises life for all eternity not something that's just for today but for all time and that's available to us through our Lord Jesus Christ his son whom he gave on the cross in Calvary that although we had gone far from him and had sinned against God he sent his one in the form of a man Jesus Christ Jesus came he was sinless he died on the cross and he bore our sin the story didn't end there on the Sunday as the women went to the tomb the tomb was empty Christ had risen to life and through his righteousness because he was sinless and had followed in his father's footsteps following all that his heavenly father had desired of him we could walk in his ways and we could have life eternal what a hope we have a hope that never perishes a hope that goes with us and a hope that we should desire to share and as we desire to share that hope let's briefly bow our heads in prayer father we thank you for all that you have given to us and for the gift of your son a hope that we wish to share with all the world and for those who do not yet know him as their saviour lord we ask that you open folks ears open their eyes they may see your glory and his wonder that their ears may hear the story of salvation the good news that you have sent through our lord Jesus Christ and we ask that your holy spirit will move the house who are heart of heart to come to know your son as their saviour to step out in faith and have a new beginning for today tomorrow and all eternity these things we ask you Jesus Christ our lord and saviour amen let's close our service this morning in psalm 47 some night

Thank you.

Thank you.