

# Grace That Calls

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[0:00] This morning we will be considering the call of God to Abraham. Of nations.

Sixteen million Jews, 1.9 billion Muslims, and 2.6 billion Christians revere Abraham as their founding father.

Such is the seeming fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham that he will be the father of nations, or the father of multitudes, which is the meaning of his name. That over 50% of the world's population have a claim to Abraham as their revered father.

And I would argue that among these three major monotheistic religions, the Jewish faith, the Islamic faith, and Christians, among these three, I will argue that the ones who have the truest claim to Abraham as father are those who are in Christ.

Now that's a controversial thing to say. But I say it anyway. The ones who have the truest claim to Abraham as father are Christians, those who are in Christ.

[1:44] That is, if you've come to faith in Christ, you've trusted in Jesus, then you are, as Apostle Paul says in the Romans 4 passage that we read, and in Galatians, that if that is true about you, you are a true son of Abraham.

You are a true son through promise. And if this is true, we cannot look at Abraham as merely an historical figure, even though he is that.

We must also see him through proper theological lens. That is, we must see Abraham from God's perspective.

And the Bible rightly helps us to do that. The story of Abraham does not start with Abraham. It starts with God.

You know, after the flood, if you're aware of your Old Testament, in the first 11 chapters of Genesis, after the flood in chapter 6, God renewed the creation of covenant that he made with Adam and Eve.

[3:02] He renewed that same covenant with Noah and his descendants. This is the covenant. To be fruitful and multiply. To fill the earth.

And God blessed them, we're told. But it wasn't long, even after that, before rebellion again ruled in the human heart.

It started even with Noah and his family. Sin and human wickedness increased all the more until the Great Dispersion in Genesis 11 at Babel.

This is where God confused the human language and forced them, that is, the humans, into different tribes and tongues. This severe judgment of God did nothing to stop man's hatred and man's sinful heart and man's rebellious heart from turning in increasing measure away from God. And as humanity was scattered upon the face of the earth, they continued to exchange the truth of God for a lie and to worship creatures rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever.

[4:21] This is the context in which Abraham lived. It is in the world of sin and rebellion against God. And Eve was no different than the men and women around him.

We see in verse 1, God comes to him. It starts with God. Now the Lord said. And that in itself is immeasurable grace.

That the Lord in love will come, will choose to reveal himself to sinful humanity, is a grace altogether. Since the fall in Genesis, the story of humanity has mostly been, mostly, vastly been about rebellion against God's majesty and against God's holiness.

And what we deserved, if God was to show himself at all, what we deserved was God's wrath, God's judgment. But in love, he relents from judgment.

And he continues to do the work of saving a wretched and undeserving human race. So despite this series of human failure, the Lord still chooses to reveal himself in divine grace to this man, this

moon worshiper from Ur of the Chaldees.

[5:47] We're told at the end of chapter 11 that Abraham, with his father Terah and his wife Sarai, and his nephew Lot, had left their land in Ur of the Chaldees, and they've stopped in Aran, where God again comes to Abraham, in grace and mercy.

And God calls him, go from your country, and your kindred, and your father's house, to the land that I will show you. I want you to note the outline of God's promise to Abraham in verses 2 and 3 of Genesis 12.

God promises to make him a great nation. God promises to bless him and make his name great. I will make you a great nation.

I will bless you. I will make your name great, the Lord says to him. Interestingly, that is what the generations were trying to do at Babel.

That is exactly what they were trying to do. In chapter 11, verse 4 of Genesis, they said, let us make a name for ourselves. And God thwarted their plans.

[7:02] Here's the point. Every attempt to make a name for ourselves without God is always going to end in failure and ruin as it did at Babel.

We are created to glorify God and to endure him forever. But inasmuch as we attempt to find fulfillment, to find meaning, outside of God, it will always be futile.

And we see the world replete with that futility. Do we not? But when God comes, when he comes in grace and mercy, when we submit to his will and his purposes, when we surrender to him, he will, and he does, make a name for us.

He has accomplished this absolutely in Jesus Christ, through whom we have been adopted as sons of God and we remain joint heirs with him.

the unfolding of what Jesus accomplished in his ministry, in his life, and continuing ministry in heaven, the unfolding ministry of that, the beginning of it is in seed form here in Genesis 12, in this promise that God makes to Abraham, Jesus' great, great, great, great grandfather.

[8:40] And God continues with Abraham. God tells him, you will be a blessing. Now, I want you to note what God is saying here to Abraham.

You will be a blessing. Those who bless you will be blessed. those who dishonor, who do not esteem you as my chosen servant, I will curse.

Essentially, what God is saying is that people's disposition towards you, Abraham, will determine how I will be disposed towards them.

if they bless you, they will be blessed. If they do not esteem you, if they curse you, they will be cursed. And God tells them, in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

Now, I hope you see that this promise to Abraham in seed form is supremely fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the offspring of Abraham.

[9:56] Abraham. Because it is through this offspring that is promised Jesus, it is through him that all the families of the earth are blessed. Those who bless the Son, that is Jesus Christ, those who bless him, and to bless the Son, to bless Jesus, is to believe who he is, to submit to him, to trust him in faith.

Those who trust him and bless him, God esteems. and blesses. They will be blessed. Those who do that are enfolded in into the Abrahamic promise.

But those who do not esteem the offspring of Abraham highly, those who reject him and despise him, remain under the curse of God.

God I want you to know that when God calls a man, he does not call you to a shared loyalty. God doesn't call and calls you to follow him only 30% or 50% or 70% of your life.

You don't get to partition how much you will follow God and the rest of it is your own little sphere.

God calls and God expects full trust and faith and obedience and that's what discipleship looks like.

[11:22] To desert all to follow God. And this is the call that God makes to Abraham. It was a call to forsake all that he knows. All that is familiar to him.

To desert, to leave his country, to leave his family, even his father's house. To desert your father's house in Abraham's day is to desert your name and your roots.

It might not mean as much to us in a world where we can be connected even when we're thousands of miles away. But what God is calling Abraham to do is to desert his father's house is to become a stranger in the world.

God calls Abraham into a pilgrimage in search of a promised land. And we see that Abraham heeded God's call.

He left his father in Aaron and he followed God into this promised land of Canaan. And I want you to see the similarity between Abraham's call here and God's call to Matthew in our gospel reading this morning.

[12:37] And in doing so, in looking at this similarity, I hope he can help us to see the shape of what discipleship looks like. To see the kind of people whom God calls and the way in which we are to hear and obey God's call and what we are to expect of this God who graciously calls sinners into life.

What we see in the gospel reading is that Matthew was a tax collector. To be a tax collector in Jesus' day is to be the most hated people in society.

And do you notice then that God's reading at the very place where Matthew is practicing his sin, exploiting his people, colluding with his people's oppressors to make himself richer and richer.

At that very place of sin, Jesus finds him. And Jesus calls him into a life of discipleship. It's just as God finds Abraham in Genesis 12.

Abraham, an idol worshipper, worshipping the gods of his fathers beyond the Euphrates. God finds Abraham and calls him in mercy to a new life with him and to a fellowship and relationship with him.

[14:04] And this is what it means to be called. And both in those both scenarios with Abraham and with Abraham's descendant Matthew, hated and sinned though he was, when they heard God's call, they left all to follow.

And sometimes the world hates to see such unmerited grace poured out on such people. People.

The world hates to see such unmerited undeserving mercy given to people like Matthew.

Matthew? That colluder, that hated man? Why, Jesus, would you call such a man?

And perhaps left to you or me, we would have demands and criteria for those we would call to share life with in the family of God. We might say, those who deserve a place at table with us would have to be respectable.

And by the way, we define what respectability looks like. We might say that such people must know how to conduct themselves in worship.

[15:25] They must adhere to a certain dress code. We might have many other stipulations to those we would have fellowship with.

And if only God would let us help him be gatekeepers, to be bouncers, as it will, at the door, checking if people have the right punch card to get in.

That's what the Pharisees were doing in Jesus' name. They were being gatekeepers. And they did not approve of what Jesus was doing. Jesus is hanging out with such people, tax collectors and sinners.

And interestingly, Matthew himself is the one telling this story in his gospel. He's the one who writes it. And he's given an account of his encounter with his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He who was despised by all, yet Jesus finds him, a lost sheep, a son of Abraham.

Abraham. And Jesus finds him and invited him to share in the promise of Abraham. Might we pause and ponder a little. If you are in Christ, perhaps you bought the lie that you're in Christ because you're worthy.

[16:52] You might have bought into the lie that God found something lovely in you. And that's why he called you. But that isn't so. God doesn't call the worthy because no one is worthy.

No one is deserving of his love. God calls the unworthy, the sick, sinners in need of mercy, and he makes them worthy.

He heals them. He shows them mercy. And makes and covers them with his perfect righteousness. That is what God does.

That's what he's done to you and me if we're in Christ. That's what he's still doing as his gospel is proclaimed. The church is a place where the unworthy comes and are cleansed by the washing of the word, by new life and participation in fellowship with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

And the fact that we are worthy at all is by God's unmerited grace and love for us and mercy. So perhaps this is a reminder for you this morning to remember that such were you before God in his mercy found you.

[18:19] Jesus' word to the Pharisees remains true for us today. Jesus says to them, go and learn what this means. I desire mercy and not sacrifice.

For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners. But upon hearing the call, upon hearing the call, if you've heard the call and you've come, then is, what does the life of discipleship look like?

Let's go back to Abraham. You see, God calls him, and then God gives him an outline of his promise of greatness and of blessedness. And Abraham did as God told him.

He took his wife and his nephew and all his belongings with him. In verse 5 of Genesis 12, we're told that they came to the land of Canaan. They entered this land of Canaan, this land that God had promised them, and the land had occupants already.

And these people were numerous. They were entrenched. They had cities. They were powerful nations and peoples. Canaan was full of Canaanites.

[19:45] Did God forget that? I mean, it seems at this point that this promise doesn't seem all that promising after all.

But verse 7, the Lord appeared to Abraham and says to him, to your offspring, I will give this land. God promised the land to Abraham.

He got to the land and he has to pass through it. The land that God promised him, he had to pass through it as a nomad and a stranger because it is already inhabited. The promise is future looking. It is not just to him, God tells him, but it is to his offspring. And yet, the casual observer looking on sees that this is a 75-year-old man that God is making this promise to.

Married to a sister, five-year-old woman who is barren and has no child, we are told in chapter 11 verse 30 of Genesis. Now, the Lord did indeed say to Abraham, I will make you a nation.

[20:59] I will give this land to your offspring. But it doesn't seem that any of these promises will come to pass at this point. A land that is already inhabited, a promise to his posterity, and he doesn't have a child of his own, of his blood.

But Abraham, though he was a sinner and unworthy of being chosen by God, God gave this promise to him. And now that the Lord has appeared to him, he heard God's call, and he believed God's word.

That's the key thing to discipleship. He heard, and he believed. We know this because he responded in faith and obedience to the word of God spoken to him.

The promise to Abraham was an act of divine grace. And it's not just for Abraham really, it was for the whole human race, this promise. Because look at the promise, look at the contours of that promise that God made to him.

God made the promise to save the world through the blessing of a man and his wife, childless though they are, landless though they were.

[22:17] And God accomplished his word to Abraham. God changed his name to Abraham, the father of multitudes. That's what the name means.

And God gave him a child of promise, Isaac. A child of promise when it seemed that all hope had faded.

God made an abiding covenant with this man and his descendants. God stayed true to his word, even when Abraham at times faltered.

And even when his descendants ultimately faltered and deserted God, God stayed true to his promise and his covenant.

We see that in Romans 4, in our epistle reading. Paul, the apostle Paul helps us to see that this promise to Abraham is not merely a promise of a physical land after all.

[23:22] It's a promise to Abraham, his offspring in chapter 4 verse 13. This promise is that he will be the heir of the world. And this promise did not come through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

This is why I said earlier, those who have the truest claim to Abraham as father are those who are in Christ. We've been grafted into this promise, not by blood, but through Jesus, through faith in him.

For Paul says in verse 14, it is the adherence of the law who are to be their heirs. For if the adherence of the law were to be their heirs, faith is null and the promise is void.

For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law, there is no transgression. Verse 16, that is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring.

it is by faith, it is by grace, that his promise that God makes to Abraham is guaranteed to all his offspring, of which you and I are.

[24 : 38] This is why in our children's Sunday school we can sing that song, Father Abraham has many sons, many sons as Father Abraham, and I am one of them.

If you are in Christ, you are one of them. The preacher of Hebrew goes on under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and gives us further insight to this call and Abraham's response of faith.

In Hebrews 11, in the annals of faith, we are made to see from verse 8, the writer of Hebrew says, by faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive an inheritance.

By faith, he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith, he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heads with him of the same promise.

For, this is verse 10, for he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. By faith, Sarah held herself received power to conceive, at 90 years old, even when she was past the age, since she considered him pit for who had promised.

[26 : 05] Therefore, from one man, and him as good as dead, from one man, were born descendants, as many as the stars of heaven, and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the sea shore.

Hebrews shows us that, ultimately, that the physical land of Canaan is but a shadow and a tag of the true land of God's promise, that God promises to Abraham.

Abraham was looking for a city, not made with human hands. He was looking forward to a city whose architect and builder is God himself. and Hebrews continues to tell us that he died in faith. He followed God in faith. He died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having only seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged in faith that there were strangers and exiles on earth.

This is the key thing. Abraham lived as a sojourner, a stranger and exile, on earth. That's not dissimilar to us as Christians.

[27 : 25] Our land, our promised land, is not the United States of America or any other nation that you've come from. We love our land, we love our country, we desire its health and wholeness, but your hope, brothers and sisters, if you're in Christ, whatever land you've come from, Canada, United States, Nigeria, anywhere else it may be, Norway, that is not your promised land.

The land of promise is the one that God himself has built and designed. And in faith, like our father Abraham, we long and look forward to this land.

we speak of this homeland and we long for this homeland. Hebrews tells us that for people who are like Abraham, people of faith, they've made it clear that they are seeking a homeland.

And if they've been thinking of that land from which they've gone out of, they would have had opportunity to return. But that is not the land they're speaking of. But as it is, they desire a better country.

That is, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city. God has called you.

[28 : 57] And if you have responded in faith to this call, and if you followed God, like Abraham did, and like Matthew did, I want to invite you to continue to follow him, as Abraham did, as Matthew did.

Continue in faith, brothers and sisters, steadfast, trusting in the one who has promised himself to you, trusting in the one who has covenanted himself to you, knowing that he is faithful, and absolutely trustworthy.

He who calls you is faithful, and absolutely trustworthy. he's called you to himself for your salvation, and he will do it.

He will fulfill his call by making you holy, guarding you through this life, watching over you, and protecting you as his home.

he is trustworthy, and faithful. Amen.