

God Calls Abram

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Date: 27 February 2000

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[0 : 00] Let's pray now as we look to God's word. Our Lord and our God, thank you that you have given us your word.

Thank you that it tells of your love for us, for what you have done for us, and who you have called us to be. Help us now as we look at it to see those things for we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, my wife helped me very much in the preparation of this sermon. She gave me one very specific instruction.

She said, don't send anyone to sleep. So thank you, Elizabeth, I'll try. The passage that we read from Genesis chapter 12, which is found on page 8 and 9 of your pew Bibles, if you want to follow it, is one of the big passages of the scriptures.

It's one of the central turning points, if you like, God starts to deal with his people. It's when God starts his dealings with his people.

[1 : 22] He starts to specify one particular people, one particular person, and starts to deal with that person. And so, in that same tradition, he deals with us today.

And so, this is a very central passage in the whole Bible. And the whole Bible reflects back on this passage.

We see it throughout the Old Testament and the New. And so, as we look at it, we have to bear in mind that it's saying something very important to us.

So let's look at it. Let's see what it does say. And it starts with a word from God. Now the Lord said to Abram, go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land I will show you. And we aren't, it's sort of fairly sudden. Up to this point, the first 11 chapters of Genesis have been on, looking in the big picture, if you like.

[2 : 33] It's looking at the, the, the whole of humanity and God dealing with humanity. And here, we have God speaking to one particular person.

And we don't really know much about this person. We know, we're told who his father is, we're told what his wife's name is, and then the Lord speaks to him.

we're told virtually nothing of the first 76 or so years of Abram's life. He comes from nowhere and God just says, get up and go.

We're told in the book of Joshua that he was somebody, his family, were people who followed other gods. But other than that, we have no record, and we certainly have no record of his, that he had any dealings with the one true God at all before this time.

So, in many ways, he is a very unlikely person. He's a very unlikely candidate for what God was calling him to.

[3 : 52] 76 years old, no children, and God's telling him to undertake a very difficult journey, settle in an unknown place, and start a large family.

No problem, is it? Well, and I think that this, this unlikeliness highlights one of the truths about the way that God uses people.

He doesn't always use the most likely candidate, and in fact, he often chooses to use the most unlikely candidate. In Deuteronomy 7, we are reminded, or Israel is reminded, that they aren't chosen because they're anything special.

They're not God's people because they are so numerous or they're so great, but because God chose them. That's the only reason. That's the only qualification. This is also, Paul also, in his letter to the Corinthians, his letters to the Corinthians, emphasises this again.

He says, God uses the weak things of this world to bring about his purposes. When we are weak, then we are strong. And I think that too often the church, we as the church, forget this.

[5 : 25] And we think that God's purposes can only be achieved by big people, by ordained people, by bishops, by, you know, great speakers, or something like that.

God uses the weak. God uses the ordinary. And I find great encouragement in that because sometimes, often, I feel pretty ordinary.

I recognise my ordinariness. But God isn't limited by our ordinariness. Abraham, who later became Abraham, the father of all faithful people, the man through whom all the nations of the world were blessed, or are being blessed, was once Abraham, an insignificant old pagan worshipper from the back blocks of earth.

And that's an encouragement because it wasn't Abraham that did it. It was God. Now, the call to Abraham wasn't an easy one.

I think it's a bit like a promising young footballer being picked in the draft to Collingwood or even Richmond or Sydney.

[6 : 56] I mean, there wasn't much prospect there. But, unlike that sort of thing, it wasn't a purposeless call either.

God is, in fact, saying to Abraham, leave your place, leave your people, leave your family's way of worship, leave your security, and trust me.

He wants Abraham to be, he wants himself to be the centre of Abraham's trust. And we as Christians are called to that same radical trust.

Not all of us are called to leave our homes, although obviously some of us are, but we are all asked to give God the central part, the central place in our lives.

things come in all sorts of different shapes and sizes and descriptions.

[8 : 09] We can put our faith, our trust, our central focus of our lives in money and the accumulation of money, in education, in getting ahead, in acquiring knowledge, in family.

I live for my family. Do you hear that? I do. We can put our own pleasure as the central focus of our lives, or we can have any combination of those, really.

Now, I'm not saying that those things are bad in themselves, but they are not supposed to be the centre of our existence.

Whatever we live for, apart from God himself, is idolatry. So we're called to radical trust in the Lord. Now, the call of Abram wasn't just without any promises. There were certain promises attached to this call.

[9 : 25] They weren't sweeteners to make it a little bit more attractive, a more attractive package for Abram. If you buy this set of whatever it is, you'll get the steak knives thrown in, or anything like that.

it's an integral part of what God is calling him to. The promises are part of what God wants to do in and through Abram.

So let's look at these promises. And I think there are four main parts to it. First of all, God promises Abram land.

it's implicit in verse one. And then in verse seven, when he gets to the land, God says, to your offspring, I will give this land.

And then later on in the book of Genesis, we see that again and again. God is saying to Abram, you will have a place to belong to.

[10 : 30] Leave your own place, I am giving you a place. The second element is that God will give Abram descendants.

God's saying to this 76 year old childless man, that I will make you a great nation. Now, I think this would have been the most difficult part of the promise for Abram to believe.

Nevertheless, he did believe it. and we see the benefit after 4,000 or so years of that promise.

And as the reading in Galatians reminded us, we are even part of that promise. Because if we have faith in the Lord Jesus, we are heirs, we are in the same line as Abram.

God is saying, I will give you a people to belong to. Leave your people, I'm going to give you a people to belong to.

[11 : 48] Thirdly, God is promising a relationship. God takes the initiative and starts acting in Abram's life. And God deals with Abram in the first person.

I will do this, I will do that. It's personal between God and Abram. And it's also going to be ongoing because God puts it all in the future.

He says, I will, implying that I'll be there, I will be part of your life from this point on. God's saying, you belong to me.

And again, this is made explicit and explained and developed further on in the book of Genesis and on through the other books. And fourthly, God promises blessing.

Now, blessing has entered Christian speak or Christianese or whatever language it is that we funny people talk sometimes. And it's hard to know exactly what it means.

[12:56] It's a sort of nebulous word. Blessing means anything nice that happens to me very often. But for this promise, it's much more than that.

God promises, I will make of you a great nation and I will bless you and I will make your name great so that you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you and the one who curses you I will curse. First of all, part of this blessing is that he will make Abram's name great.

Now, this means a lot more in Semitic and in African contexts. To have a great name is very important.

It's one of the great aspirations of people. To have a great name means to be a person of substance, of importance.

[13:57] It's to have a degree of power and respect. To have a great name means that your legacy will continue when you're no longer around.

to have a great name is a very desirable thing. The blessing goes further than that though.

The blessing to Abram, well, it probably included material blessing. We certainly know that by the time Abraham, as he then was, died, he was a very wealthy man.

But it's much more than that. And that fades into insignificance besides the blessing that God is talking about.

The main thrust of this blessing is that God is going to use Abram for his purposes. That is where the big blessing is.

[14:58] The blessing is that God is going to use him to make him a blessing to other people. being used by God for his purposes is the greatest honor that we can aspire to.

And we who are God's people are heirs, as it said in the Galatians passage, we are heirs to the promises of Abraham.

Well, how can we be heirs? What does it mean? Those four elements, how do they work out in the lives of Christians? How can they be relevant to the lives of Christians?

Well, firstly, we do have a home. We are called to a kingdom where we belong to. Jesus said that he was going to prepare a place for us.

Philippians chapter 3 verse 20 reminds us that our citizenship is above. We carry the passport of heaven.

[16:19] In Nigeria, it's very obvious that we are not from Nigeria. Anybody can tell. because we're a different colour and we stand out there.

And we aren't, and it's obvious that we aren't, we don't belong there in a sense. For Christians, it's not quite so obvious.

You can't tell by the colour of their skin whether they're Christians or not. But it's true, nevertheless. We don't belong here.

we have our citizenship above. That's part of the blessing, the promises that we have in Jesus Christ. We have a people to belong to.

We're told by the Bible that we are part of God's, of Jesus' body here on earth. When we believe in the Lord Jesus, accept him by faith, and we'll talk more about that later, then we become a part of his people.

[17:39] We belong. And we belong because we belong to Jesus. we do have relationship.

That was the third of those four elements. We have a relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. And again, the Galatians passage mentioned that we not only have a relationship, but we have God's spirit himself dwelling inside us.

And fourthly, we are indeed blessed. blessed. We bear a great name. God has not made our name great.

He has given us a great name, the name of the Lord Jesus, the name that is above all names. We are blessed.

Doesn't necessarily mean material blessing, and that's a false teaching that's getting about in the Nigerian church quite a lot, that when you become a Christian you can expect to be rich.

[18 : 56] Well, our treasure isn't treasure here on earth. We have treasure in heaven. And it's far greater value than any stocks you can buy or any bank, and more secure than any bank account you can open.

We are blessed. We are blessed because our sins are forgiven. We're clean. God wants to use us. Because the blessings aren't just for our benefit. Coming back to the passage in Genesis, the blessings that God was giving to, or the promises that God was giving to Abram, weren't just for his benefit.

They're not just for him to enjoy. Now, we do enjoy all of these blessings. That's true, but that's not the end of it. God has wider purposes.

God was blessing Abram so that he could be a blessing and that ultimately all the nations of the earth would be blessed through him. What God was doing was not just making things nice for an obscure native of Ur, but he had the salvation of the whole earth in view when he was giving these good things to Abram.

[20 : 41] And similarly for us, we're given the blessings that God gives us not just so that we can enjoy it, not just so that we can be comfortable, not just so that we can be secure.

Yes, that's true, but there's much more to it than that. We're called to much greater things than just that. One of the themes that seems to run through the Old Testament, one of the main lessons that we can learn from the Old Testament people of God, is how God's people, Abram's descendants, kept on forgetting that God's choice of them was not a matter of favoritism.

It wasn't just because they were good and God was going to bless them because they had to enjoy things, but it was God's way of blessing all people.

And certainly that continues over into the New Testament. Jesus commissions the disciples, those who were privileged and blessed to be with him, to go out and share it with everybody else.

He reminded them that those to whom much is given, much will be expected. And this principle extends to all the blessings that we have from God.

[22 : 15] We need to recognise that all good things do come from God and seek to use those good things to bless others.

Perhaps we can see that most easily in material things. It's probably not the easiest one to do it in, but it's the easiest one to see it, how it could work.

look, we in Australia are very well off materially. Even those who are below the so-called poverty line are far richer than many people that we work amongst and the majority of people in the world, in fact.

And as we are blessed in that way, well, it doesn't take a lot of figuring to figure out how we could share that with others. But again, as I say, it's not the easiest thing to do.

But this also extends to other areas. The educational, we are blessed in this country with a great educational system, no matter how much you complain about it, it is far above most other countries.

[23 : 30] We are blessed, many of us, with families, we are blessed with belonging to Holy Trinity Doncaster, with the people who serve us as our ministers, with the teaching that we get week in, week out.

We are blessed. Now, what does God want us to do with that? We have to figure that out. And, in fact, you here at Holy Trinity have shared some blessings.

And sometimes the blessings that we share, they seem fairly small at the time, and yet they can mean so much to other people. Last time we were home, some money was collected by this congregation for a grain project.

I don't know, some of you will remember it. people who were hungry. Well, I can't quantify the effect that that has had, but I know that many people didn't go hungry that would have gone hungry because of that.

It was distributed to people who needed it, and well, very often in our community we have people dying because of illness contracted while they were malnourished.

[25 : 03] And so the blessing that you passed on has been a blessing to others. what's the response?

What does Abram do? Verses 4 and 5, he sets off in faith. He doesn't argue the toss and say, God, do you know what you're doing?

Oh, I'll wait for confirmation, or let's just talk this through and see how it could work out. No? Verse 4, so Abram went.

He just went. Not knowing how on earth these unlikely sorts of things that God was promising could come about, he just trusted God.

And faith is always what God requires from us. The Bible says that through faith in Jesus Christ, we receive the blessings, the promises of Abram.

[26 : 12] As we have faith in the death of Jesus for our sake and decide to live for him, we become one of God's people. And so, the promises of Abram, as we've described them, are for us as God's people.

people. And scripture helps us a little here because it defines faith, it tells us what faith involves.

And one of the more classical or the more clear definitions of faith that we have is found in Hebrews chapter 11.

And later on in the chapter it uses the illustration of Abraham to help us understand faith a bit more, but it gives this definition in Hebrews 11 verse 1. It says that faith is trusting in God even when we haven't experienced how things will work out.

Trusting in God when we don't know how it's going to work out. And then it says it's being confident of the things that we hope for.

not because of the power of our hope or the power of positive thinking or any of those other things, but because God is trustworthy, being confident in God's trustworthiness.

[27 : 39] Abraham believed God and did what God commanded him to do. He took God at his word. He said, well, you've said it, I'll do it.

I don't know how it's going to happen, but yeah, let's do it. And I guess he would have been pretty open to ridicule. We aren't told any of this, but experience of how faith is greeted by other people, they probably questioned him.

His friends and his family, when he said, bye, I'm going down to that way. I don't know where. I'll just go and I'll have a family down there. They would have questioned it, said, you're crazy.

What are you doing? Why are you dragging your wife off in a crazy venture like this? You've got to take your nephew as well. Aren't you wrecking his prospects?

Etc. etc. But he trusted God nevertheless, despite what anybody else may or may not have said.

And because of that, blessing followed.

[28 : 57] We can be confident in a faithful God. We can step out in obedience in faith. even when we don't know what the outcome will be.

We can be confident. Well, Abram didn't see the results of all of, or all of the results of what happened.

He starts to though. In verses 6 through 9, he goes to the land and God shows him the land. He starts to see the promises coming true.

He didn't see the end of it. We haven't seen the end of it. It's still going on. But he recognised what was happening.

And what was his response? Verse 7 says he built an altar. Verse 9 says, or verse 8 says he invoked the name of the Lord.

[29 : 58] God. He praised God. That is an appropriate response to seeing God fill his promises. Praise of God.

So the command to us is to trust and follow Jesus. Leave our self-centred, self-orientated life and follow him fully.

And the blessings to us are as they were to Abram. A relationship with God, a place where we belong, a people that we belong to, and security in Christ Jesus.

God does want to use us. God wants us to be blessings to others. And he'll do that in different ways for each one of us.

us. But we must be open to using the blessings that he has already given us. with our families.

[31 : 12] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.