

Abraham: God's choosing, God's Calling

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[0 : 00] And I want to consider with you the first three and a half verses of Genesis 12 that begins. 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.

We live in a society that's lost any sense of purpose. We've lost any sense of a sovereign God who's over all.

We're in a society that's lost any conception of God who has a plan for salvation, the salvation of sinful humanity centered in the Lord Jesus.

And the more that you observe society, the more that you realize that we're living in an age that really seems to have anyway and is portrayed to have no ultimate purpose in life other than to eat and drink and be merry.

Last week one of the saddest things, or certainly one of the saddest things that I've seen in a long time was a footballer who's now deceased, a footballer who was speaking about his life.

[1 : 22] He knew he was dying of an incurable disease. Yet, as he said, when he certainly was able to speak, he said he had no regrets. No regrets about the way that his life had been lived for self and for sin and all that he got out of his short span of life.

He did it his way. And his way in the end was meaningless. But that's not the way of the one true God. It's not the way of all who follow the one true God.

But we affirm, and you who know him, you affirm that he's sovereign. He's the God of history. He's the God whose plan of salvation for sinner man, sinful humanity, that plan has been worked out for all eternity, and that plan has been effected in space and time.

And that plan of salvation that was first decreed, certainly first decreed in the Garden of Eden, remember after man fell in sin and God promised that one to come would crush the head of the serpent, that plan was carried out stage after stage until the coming of the Lord Jesus.

And in that plan, as we see recorded in Scripture, we see key turning points. Key turning points happening. And one of the great turning points in that implementation of God's plan of salvation for his people, one of these great turning points is the call of Abraham to leave his home, leave his homeland, and go to the land of Canaan.

[2 : 58] And there, as we know from Scripture, God would make Abraham the father of a great nation, the nation of Israel. And of course from the nation, that nation, Jesus in his human nature would come from.

And it's this particular great turning point that's recorded in Scripture here in the life of Abraham that we're going to focus on.

As we see the hand of God that's directed towards the coming of the Lord Jesus. And we're seeing here in this God-directed action, even in the call of Abraham, this call that actually has impacted you and for all for whom Jesus came to give his life.

Because this action speaks of God's sovereign purposes, God's purposes that can't be thwarted. If you like that God-directed action that tells of who God is in his glory.

And it's therefore he whom we worship and give glory for his great plan of salvation. So, I want to focus then on this call of Abraham because we need to, every time we come before God and worship, we come to know him, we come to worship him, we come to hear him speak to us through his word.

[4 : 13] And as we're focusing on these three and a half verses, we pray that we will grow in knowledge of God. That we'll appreciate more his working out of his great plan of salvation.

And see his sovereign purposes, yes, effected through undeserving individuals like Abraham, but individuals whom God has chosen and God chooses to further his purposes.

So, three things from this passage. First of all, God's choosing. But you know, I'm sure you've looked at this story many times, but you know, when we think of the story of Abraham, even the call of Abraham, I think sometimes we forget the most basic aspect of the story here is God's initiative. God choosing, God calling this man to be the great father of Israel. This man who would be called to be the father of many nations. This man called to be an ancestor of the Lord Jesus Christ, certainly Jesus' human flesh.

And we have to ask, why would God, why did God choose Abraham to be this great figure that he is in the history of God's people? In the history of salvation?

[5 : 33] I mean, think of Abraham's background. He's from a pagan background. You know, many years later, when Joshua was giving his farewell address to Israel, Joshua spoke of Abraham's family in the context of their having worshipped other gods.

Worshipping false gods. But then Joshua said this as he was echoing God's word. He said, this is God speaking through Joshua, then I took your father Abraham from beyond the river, from beyond the river Euphrates.

I took your father Abraham from beyond the river. So God chose this man, this man who'd come from a pagan background, this man who was one of the sons, as you see later in chapter 11, the sons of Terah, this man who would be the father of Israel.

And, you know, humanly speaking, Abraham, just another person from another family in a faraway place. We might even say that Abraham was called to a place that seemed to certainly be at that time on the edge of human existence.

But God chose to save this man, Abraham. And God chose through Abraham that blessings would be received.

[6 : 52] Even though Abraham deserved nothing of God's saving grace, Abraham deserved nothing of God's blessing. But as somebody's written of Abraham, he was the first Jew who was a Gentile, the first Hebrew who was a heathen.

Abraham, the great patriarch of Israel, I mean, yes, I mean, he's according to great, great acclaim in the Old Testament and as we've seen in the New Testament. I mean, Jesus himself described, Jesus described himself as the son of Abraham, certainly in this human genealogy.

But just as with every other child of God, Abraham was chosen in love, chosen by God's love.

God's, remember, as we were thinking some time ago in our evening services in Ephesians, God's electing love.

So when you read here of Abraham being called to leave his country, to go to the land of Canaan, never forget that before Abraham was called, he was chosen. Chosen in love by God.

And surely has to give you, you who know God the Lord as Saviour, you who know Jesus as Saviour, a humbling gratitude to God.

[8 : 10] The same God who chose Abraham, chose you. The same God who blessed Abraham with that great measure of blessing. The same God blesses you with a particular measure of blessing that God has gifted you.

And for the benefit of the Bible class that I've just come in, we're in Genesis chapter 12. You can read quietly to yourself the first four verses of God calling Abraham to leave his homeland to go to another place, the land of Canaan.

In fact, we're going to read verse 1 again about Abraham's calling. Genesis 12 verse 1, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land.

I will show you. Now think of the circumstances of this call that God gives to Abraham. Here's a man that we might say up to this point, maybe we might even call him an obscure old man.

He's married to Sarah. His wife, he comes from an area we would call nowadays Mesopotamia, maybe I suppose even Iraq. It's certainly hundreds of miles away from the land of Canaan that God's directing to Abraham, where Abraham's going to settle down eventually.

[9 : 28] This man Abraham, who will be one of the ancestors of Jesus and his human nature, human flesh. This man Abraham, who will be known as the friend of God.

This man whom God is calling to obey him because God can be trusted completely. But what about this call? Look at the verses again.

Verse 1, Now the Lord said to Abraham, Now the Lord said to Abraham, What does that tell us? It tells us this call is a sudden call. I mean, there's a lot going on here.

We've said right at the start of our thoughts in this passage, God is sovereign. And God moves in history. Yes. And he moves through the lives of individuals.

God is the God of history. God has a plan for the redemption of his people. As we've said earlier, through the coming to earth of the Lord Jesus. Jesus came to live a life of perfect obedience.

[10:30] Jesus came to die on the cross as our sin bearer. And Jesus has come to be raised again to give you that sure hope of eternal life.

And all that plan that we've been considering earlier and we're considering again now, the seeds of that plan you see here in the Old Testament. Now, obviously no time to look over the first 11 chapters of Genesis where we're seeing that plan unfolding as man is created and lives out through the generations.

But won't we come even to Noah, for example? We know that through Noah, mankind was saved from destruction. And then you go to chapter 11 of Genesis, from verse 10 to 32.

Again, you see how God is at work, how he preserves the generations from Noah, then Noah's son Shem, and then successive generations till we come to this man, Terra.

You see in chapter 11, verse 24. And somehow Terra's moved on. The generations have moved on. And there he is right in the Middle East, we would say, in a place called Ar of the Chaldees, eastern Iraq.

[11:44] He's got three sons, as you see in chapter 11, verse 27. One of the sons is Abram. And you see in verse 31 of chapter 11, we're told that Abram, along with his father Terra, and Abram with his wife Sarah, and Abram's nephew Lot, they set off from Ur to go to Canaan.

Hundreds of miles away. And we're not told why this move happens, but we're told that they settle in a place called Haran. You see that, chapter 11, verse 31.

Okay, halfway between where he set off from to the land of Canaan. And it's there, in that place, Haran, where, you know, Abram would have expected to live out his days and be a very prosperous man.

We've gained a lot of wealth in Haran. But see verse 1 of chapter 12. Now the Lord said, something immediate has happened. Something new is happening in the life of this man, this old man from Ur. Because God has taken the initiative in his life. God stepped into that moment of space and time. God's taken that initiative. He's communicated that initiative by His Word.

[12:58] Notice, the Lord said to Abram. Okay, to Abram is a sudden word. But it's God's eternal plan. It's a call that's been rooted in eternity.

We might even say hidden in eternity. But it's now revealed to Abram. And yes, revealed to ourselves in that moment of space and time. The Lord said.

And you know, please remember that God is still speaking to you today. He's speaking to you through His Word. His Word of truth. His reliable Word.

His trustworthy Word. Because, I'm sure many of you learned when you were growing up in the catechism, the Word of God is the only rule, the only standard to direct you how you might glorify and enjoy God.

This is the Word of God. And, it's what we are, surely. It's what we proclaim here in Livingston Free Church. We are Bible-based.

[14:03] God's Word-based. And through being Word-based, pointing to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God. And we pray that, you know, we truly do seek to obey as God has given us instruction by His Word.

So we listen to God speaking to us through His Word. Listen into the very voice of the Lord Jesus, the Word of God. And here's Abram listening to God speaking to him.

God speaking to him as we're taking the initiative. And in hearing, listening to God speak to him, and obeying that Word, Abram's life is going to be changed.

Yes, the life of mankind changed forever. And notice, notice the first one again, it's the Lord who's speaking to Abraham. Who's speaking?

It's the Creator of the universe. It's the One who's created time, the One who's created all things. This is the Covenant Lord of Israel. This is God who's communicating with Abram.

[15:10] God the Lord communicating with one of His creatures, one of His creation. I mean, for 75 years of his life, for 75 years of his life, Abram there is, well, as we said, he's probably just appeared as another individual.

But now this individual is in direct communication with God the Lord. And this is surely something to see and to dwell on. God isn't, we might say, simply, the sovereign God who inhabits eternity. God is personal. He's the one true God, yes, He's mighty in power, He's awesome in holiness, but it's God, the Lord, who reaches down to speak to sinful humanity and doing so in love.

And here's Abraham, a sinner like herself, like me, like you, and yet God speaks to the sinner Abraham and He speaks to him in mercy, He speaks to him in love. And that's the message that we make no apologies to proclaim.

We worship the sovereign God, we worship the God of love, we worship the God who reaches down to His people in love and delights to speak to you in love.

[16:22] And yes, even His chastisements are given in love. I mean, I deserve His wrath, you deserve His wrath, but He speaks to you in love.

We deserve His eternal punishment. God gives you His eternal loving kindness. And Abraham was no different to the ancestors that you read off in chapter 11. They are no different to ourselves. God called Abraham as He calls you. God called Abraham by His saving grace. And He calls you as He called Abraham by grace. A grace that reaches out to lost sinners and saves sinners such as Abraham, such as you.

So, ask yourself this morning, are you listening to God speak to you through His Word? Are you hearing Him speak to you? Yes, whether as an individual, as a people.

I mean, He's speaking to you this morning, speaking to you through this very Word. To some, He may well be saying to you, come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

[17:31] To others, all of you, He's saying, repent, be forgiven, and you'll be forgiven. He's saying again, He's saying through His Word, obey me, listen to my voice, obey me, obey my Word.

Love me, love my neighbour, or your neighbour as yourself. And so, it's for you, for me, to respond to God in obedience as God has spoken to you in love.

But remember that obedience involves cost. Love always has a cost. A person who gives love that can be costly.

And for Abram, there would be a cost in his obedience. You see that verse 1 again, He goes from your country, your kindred, your father's house to the land. I will show you. In other words, leave the place you thought was going to be, well, you're just going to remain, your comfort zone, your security.

Leave the place you thought you were going to, well, be identified with. Leave the country of Haran, the place you thought was where you were going to rest, be a resting place.

[18:45] And He says, leave your people, your kindred, leave your father's house, leave all that you held so dear, and go to the land I'm going to show you.

Obedience is costly. But, you know, we're commanded to leave the world's values, leave the so-called security that the world promises.

It's a false promise that, you know, somehow the world will give truly what you can truly satisfy, but no, it is a costly obedience to leave the world's values, security.

God says, leave, go, go from all that you thought at once was your identity and security, and go to where God will give you that new identity, that new everlasting security.

Now, that was the call of Abraham, it was unexpected, it was sudden, and yet it had to be obeyed, even though the cost in human terms was going to be great, turned, there's no different principle for you this day.

[19:56] There is a cost to discipleship. There is a cost in obeying God's word, and there is a cost, a costly obedience in obeying the Lord Jesus.

You will recognize the sovereignty of Jesus in your life when you submit to him and everything that God gives you and asks you to do in leaving, leaving behind all that had hindered in your life as a Christian and even had hindered you in coming to know the Lord Jesus.

And you may never be asked literally to leave your country or family and obey that call in that particular context. But if you're a Christian, you're going to live as if none of these things really matter because like Abraham, you will know that your security is in the Lord.

Remember what Jesus said? Matthew chapter 10, whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

Whoever does not take his cross, the costliness, the taking their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. And you can see, you know, the costliness of Abraham's obeying God's command.

[21 : 14] Go to the land I will show you. I mean, God doesn't say go to the land of Canaan and I'm going to tell you everything that's going to happen in your life, every detail. No, just go to the land I will show you.

The promise is there that God will show Abraham the land and Abraham will go forward in faith. I've said the man who thought his final years were going to be in that place called Haran, he's now told go to this unspecified place.

Why will he obey? Because it's God the Lord who's speaking. And Abraham must respond in faith when God speaks his word to him. The land.

The land. The God in his sovereign knowledge knew the land, what the land was, the land of Canaan, the land we know better as the land of Israel. But that land, the name of that land wasn't known to Abraham.

So Abraham was being tested in his faith. Leave his comfort zone for a place he didn't know. A place he'd never been to before. But God had already mapped out everything.

[22 : 22] God in his sovereign will had provided the land for Abraham and Abraham must respond in faith and go to that land. Now God in his infinite wisdom, God had decreed that it would be the land of Canaan, the land, that land where God's people would dwell.

The land in which the focus of world history would centre on the person of the Lord Jesus. Jesus would minister in that land. Jesus would obey God fully in that land.

Jesus would give his life in that land. But Abraham's got to go to that land, got to go in obedience and live in obedience to God in going there. It's the place where God would establish his people, the place where the saviour would be to redeem mankind.

Now, Abraham knows nothing of this, but he'll still go in faith and go fully in faith. Because you see, real faith, true faith, means trusting God completely.

It's what the writer to the Hebrews said of faith, being certain of what we don't see. And that has to be your challenge, to trust in God for all that he calls you to do and to serve him.

[23 : 41] God has mapped out a plan for you as an individual, for this congregation itself. God will lead you by his timetable, by his will, and his way.

Because it's his wisdom that prevails. And we say, not my will, but your will. It be done. And maybe even you're afraid of what that will is that God has for you.

But cling to the certainty, as we're saying to the children of the God who promises God's promises never fail. They're sure and certain in the Lord Jesus. Even his promise to be with you always.

God is with you and will direct you in his way for his glory. And that, you know, really takes us on in this call, further aspect of this call of God to Abram.

Because, as we were just hinting at just a moment ago, the call is sure and certain, sure and certain promises of a sovereign God that you see there in verse 2 to 3.

[24 : 43] I will make of you, see the promise, I will make of you a great nation. I will bless you, the promise. I will make your name great so that you will be a blessing.

I will bless, see the promise after promise. I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonors you. I will curse and you, all the families of the earth, shall be blessed. Just note the number of promises within that statement of God.

I mean, God's promising Abraham so much. God's going to make Abraham the father of a great nation. God's going to give the seemingly unknown man, going to give him a great name.

God's going to bless Abraham. Abraham's going to be a blessing to others. And as we have read there, so much so that all the peoples of the earth will know blessing because of Abraham, what are we seeing?

What are we seeing here? Well, as we've said, I mean, Abraham has to obey God for, yes, for these promises to be fulfilled. Go to the land I will show you so that, there's that purpose, so that I may make you a great nation.

[25 : 51] Go so that I may bless you. Go in order that I make your name great. here's God's sovereign power, God's sovereign control, if you like, alongside man's responsibility.

Maybe you can put it the other way around, man's responsibility alongside God's sovereign control. And God's promise, yes, I will bless you. You have a responsibility to obey him.

I mean, Abraham had to obey God's command. He had to go physically, yes, and by faith, go to the land that God would show him so that, in order that, he enjoy the blessings of God's promises. God has promised to bless Abraham. Abraham has to obey to receive his blessings. And, again, nothing has changed. What does God say?

He promises, promises to honor you, you honor him. So, conduct yourself in a way that honors God. Yes, glorify him by your life, by your witness, by your love for him, by your love one for another.

[27 : 01] Yes, even within the congregation itself. And God's promises are sure, God's promises are certain. And we are to live by faith and not by sight.

You see, sight would have considered, you know, God's promises that he made there, you see in verse 2 and 3, sight would have said, these promises are mad, they're foolish, impossible.

But faith would see in God's promises the certainty of their fulfillment. Sight would just have considered everything about Abram at that stage, everything about Sarah.

Sight would have said, no, it's not going to happen, surely a barrier to God's word being fulfilled. But faith would believe and does believe that with God nothing is impossible. And, of course, it was through Abraham that the nation of Israel came to be.

It was through Abraham that the line of Jesus' genealogy continued up to Jesus' birth, of course. It was through Abraham that, as we said, the Gentile became a Jew and the heathen became a Hebrew.

[28 : 04] And so, by faith, we can thank God that, yes, through God's choosing and God's enabling, we see the word of God utterly powerful. Yes, through that blessing on Abraham and blessing through Abraham.

With God, all things are possible. So, trust in the God whose promises are sure and certain in the Lord Jesus.

God's word to Abraham was sure and certain. The word was fulfilled. Oh, yes, come to him. There will be times when you'll come to him crying out, I believe, help my unbelief.

But God is the one whose word never falls. His word never fails. And just as Abraham trusted God and God's word to him, so it's for you and for me to trust God in all things because his word is sure and certain.

And that, well, takes us to the final point you see there in verse 4. Certainly the first half of verse 4, so Abraham went, so Abraham went, or so Abraham left.

[29 : 14] this old man is going to settle somewhere else. He's going to, we might say, establish a new identity.

But he's going to leave, he will leave, and he obeys just as the Lord had asked him to. In fact, if you were to read on in verse 5, we're told that he takes his wife, his nephew, takes all his possessions, and God leads him in the direction to the land of Canaan, and Abraham arrives there.

Here's this, we might say, the single-minded response of a submissive servant. He's responded to God's call, he's responded in active faith, he's going to follow, and he will follow the leading of God. God is Lord. And you can just imagine the reaction of others. And they see Abraham, this old man with Sarah and Lot, his possessions leaving the land of Haran.

I'm sure the neighbors would have thought he was mad. Going on a road he'd never traveled on before. Going beyond the furthest point that they could see from the land of Haran.

[30 : 26] But Abraham obeys. Abraham obeys. Noah obeyed when everyone thought he was mad to build the ark. Abraham obeys, even though he would have had so much, well, strange looks even.

But Abraham obeys. That call of God, Abraham will do God's will, even though he didn't know exactly all of God's purposes for him. And that's why we read in Hebrews 11 verse 8, by faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to go to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance, and he went out not knowing where he was going.

See, the reality of faith is seen in that obedience to the call of God to do whatever God commands you to do. even though you don't know even part of the outcome of the response of that obedience.

And you know, you can just picture Abraham there and all his entourage as they're going in that southwesterly direction, traveling for hundreds of miles to the reach that God, the place that God had purpose for them.

of course it's going to be many more years before the great nation of Israel would take possession of the land of Canaan. But Abraham's faith at that point was immediate, it was active, and it was anticipatory, anticipating future glory.

[31 : 48] Here's one man, one man who obeyed God and one man who obeyed God fully, one man who bowed to the will of God, even though at that point he didn't know fully what that will would encompass there in the land of Canaan.

It's a lesson, it's a lesson, it's a lesson when God calls you to serve him in a particular way. He is one of the heroes of the faith. He is an inspiration in faith to respond as God has called you to do a particular act of service for him.

Yes, but, of course, there's one man who did bow to the will of God the Father. One man who did obey fully and who did know what would be the result of his full obedience.

And, of course, that was the Lord Jesus. Jesus who obeyed his Father's will fully when God called him to leave the glory of heaven and come to earth. when Jesus left the perfection of glory, when Jesus came to live with sinner man in Israel, when Jesus obeyed his Father fully and did so throughout his act of service.

And even in death, you see, when you even see Jesus' faith, when Jesus committed his soul into his Father's keeping. Yes, Abraham is a hero of faith, but surely the Lord Jesus is your ultimate inspiration of faith.

[33 : 17] Because when we see the Lord Jesus, Jesus trusted his Father's love fully and completely. That his Father had given him to do a particular work, that work of salvation. And Jesus obeyed fully.

And Jesus fulfilled fully the plan of salvation that God had for us and has for his people. Jesus came and obeyed fully when he gave himself for us on the cross.

So we can say this, that yes, Abraham's faith, even there, points to the faith of Jesus and encourages you to live by faith in God's promises.

Jesus. And well, maybe sometimes we doubt God's calling, doubting God's calling to you. But remember, it's God who chooses, God who calls.

And trust him in that call. Trust him as you go forward in faith. And as you go forward in faith, look to the Lord Jesus, who's the author and perfecter of that faith.

[34 : 21] Amen. Let us pray. Our Lord, our