

Tests of Faith and the One Ever Faithful

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Preacher: Mike Loosa

[0:00] This is the word of the Lord. Heavenly Father, thank you for this word.

Thank you for the book of Genesis and what you've been teaching us as we've walked through it. And God, as we approach your living word once again that pierces the division of soul and spirit, of joint and of marrow, God, I pray that you would truly speak to our hearts and change us this morning increasingly into your likeness.

For your glory we pray in Christ's name. Amen. Well, good morning, church. My name is Mike, one of the pastors here at Shoreline. And as Andrew already said, we're so glad that you've joined us this morning.

Kids, glad that you're all also here as well. If you haven't gotten them, there are sheets. I don't know if there's more in the back table or not, but there are sheets for the kids to be able to track along with the sermon and fill different things out that Christina makes for us every single week.

Now, I have a question for all of the students out there, whether you're still in school or not in school. Okay, if you have a two-question exam and you get the first question wrong and the second question right, what grade do you get?

[1:17] Anybody? 50%? 50%? And what letter grade would that be? An F. A fail. A failing score, right?

50% is a failing score. I think that's still a fail in today's day. Unless it's curved. No curve. 50%.

Now, I'm not going to ask for any raise of hands here, but as you survey your own life, okay, just think about the events of your life that have transpired over this past week. And when it comes to living up to the moral standards of God, you know, which Jesus says is summarized in loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and then loving your neighbor as yourself.

So that summarizes the law. If you think about the past week that has transpired, what kind of grade do you think that you would get for your ability to live up to God's standard?

Now, before you answer that question, because maybe you're sort of calculating like, okay, I think I did like 7 out of 10, probably, 8 out of 10 maybe, you need to remember that there is actually only one passing score, and it's 100%.

[2:28] Because the thing is that anything less than 100% means that you have broken the law, right? To break the law makes one a lawbreaker. That's true of our own country and its laws.

It's true of the law of God. If you haven't upheld every one of the laws of God, you are a lawbreaker. So as you think about this past week, how are you doing? Now, if any of you receive an F for your performance, I want you to take heart, because so did everybody else around you.

Okay, we've all failed. And your thing is misery loves its company, right? Misery loves its company. And do you know who else is among our company? Abraham, the great patriarch of Israel.

In today's passage, Abraham's faith is tested in two different ways. In the first way, he goes to Egypt, and he totally flops. And then he recovers, and then he kind of nails the second.

But that's still a 50% score. That's a fail, right? That's an F. And yet God responds at the end of chapter 13 as if Abraham had scored 100%.

[3:38] Now, the title of today's sermon is this. It's Tests of Faith and the One Ever Faithful. Tests of Faith and the One Ever Faithful. And the main point that I'm going to be preaching on today is this.

God tests our faith for its strengthening, yet even when we falter, God remains faithful. God tests our faith for its strengthening, yet even when we falter, God remains faithful.

Now, if you haven't already, please open your Bibles to Genesis chapter 12. If you've just joined us here for the first time, we've been walking through the book of Genesis passage by passage.

And just last week, we made a pretty big pivot in the storyline of Genesis and really in the storyline of all of human history. We moved from Genesis 1 through 11, which is called the primeval history, the history of the beginning of the world, creation, fall, the beginnings of redemption, how the nations spread abroad.

And we transition to Genesis 12 through 50. Really, the rest of the book is the patriarchal history. It's the history of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and how they become a nation, the chosen people of Israel, the people through whom God would channel blessing and salvation to the nations.

[4:55] And I mentioned last week, whereas Genesis 1 through 11 covers about 2,000 years of history, the next 11 chapters cover only 25. So we're really zooming in here.

And that shows you the importance of the story of Abraham. Moses is slowing down the narrative and giving Israel, the first audience of this, this greater detail of their own origin.

This is where you come from. And as we talked about last week, for those who are sons and daughters of Abraham, those who are heirs of God's promises, which is true of you, if you believe in Jesus Christ, then we are sons and daughters of Abraham.

We are heirs of the promises. That means that this is also the storyline of our own origin. This is our storyline. Now, in Genesis 12, 1 through 9, which we looked at last week, God calls Abraham to forsake everything and to follow him, right?

And he gives Abraham those beautiful promises. There were eight different promises that we walked through, which we summarized as a promise of land, a promise of seed or offspring. I'm going to make of you a nation.

[6:06] And then a promise of blessing. I will bless you. And then all the nations through you. And Abraham, we saw, he responds in faith, right? He, in obedience, he heads to the land of Canaan, and there he builds this altar of worship to God.

Well, two altars of worship to God. And then we come to this week's passage, and we come to these tests of faith. And so here is the first test of faith.

Faith test number one, affliction. Abraham sojourned in Egypt. And Garrett read these verses for us. Now look in your Bibles.

Look at verse 10 of chapter 12. Now there was a famine in the land. So Abraham went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land.

So there's this famine in the land of Canaan. And as a result, we see Abraham makes for Egypt, right? He expects that there, in the fertile Nile River Valley, there's ample food.

[7:07] At first glance, we look at that and say, well, of course, that would be very logical to do. There's a famine, so we're going to go find food. Right? So on the surface, it seems like that verse is simply setting up the story to come.

But, and it is doing that, but I think there's something else going on here. Notice how there's no inquiring of the Lord, right? There's no rehearsing of the promises that Abraham just received. I'm going to bless you. This land is going to become yours and all of your offsprings. Abraham is leaving the land of promise without consulting in God. And so I think we're actually to see here that Abraham is not acting in faith, but in fear.

And so we can call it the first sub-point here is fear of death by famine. We see it's fear of death by famine in verse 10. And then as they're about to enter into Egypt, we see this other fear operative. And it's fear of death by Pharaoh. Right? Abraham recognizes like, hey, I've got a gorgeous wife and the Egyptians are going to want me dead as a result.

[8:16] Now again, on the one hand, this is a very logical fear. We've seen in the book of Genesis, sinful mankind is wicked and violent and driven by greed and driven by lustful desire.

Abraham is this vulnerable refugee and apparently his 65-year-old wife, Sarai, is a beautiful woman. And so this fear of his is logical. But that's because, friends, he's operating on a horizontal plane right now.

He's not operating on a vertical plane. He's operating based on what he can see with his physical eyes, not the eyes of faith. Let me just remind you of the promises God made to Abraham.

I will make of you a great nation and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonors you I will curse and in you all families of the earth shall be blessed.

And Abraham is now failing to believe in these lofty promises. And so what does he do? He does what we all do when we fail to believe the promises of God. He takes matters into his own hands.

[9:25] First, by going to Egypt. Second, by concocting this deceitful scheme in which they're going to tell everyone that Sarai is his sister. Now, we will learn in chapter 20 that Sarai is in fact his half-sister.

And so it's not an outright lie to say that she's his sister, but it's certainly deceitful. It's certainly deceitful. They're choosing to withhold the fact that she's also his wife.

And so Abraham right now, he's grasping for control. He's moving forward in self-reliance, driven again by fear, not by faith. Now this scheme leads in verses 15 to 16 to this sort of strange and ironic mix of results.

And so the next thing is the ironic results. Do you mind turning me up just like a little bit more? Now first of all, the plan backfires. And it's interesting, the word choice that Moses uses, Eve in the garden saw the fruit, she deemed it good, and she took it.

And we've seen this same word play in Genesis. The Egyptians, they see Sarai, they deem her beautiful, and then they take her, right? And they bring her even into Pharaoh's house. Now of course, Sarai was not a forbidden fruit, because for all Pharaoh knows, she's an unmarried woman, right?

[10:49] But this is probably much more than Abram had bargained for. I don't know that he was expecting her to be taken into the harem of the king of Egypt. That's the first sort of ironic result.

Abram's trying to protect him and his family. Sarai gets taken into Pharaoh's household. But here's the next ironic result, is that despite Abram's fear, despite his lying, despite his lack of faith, he gains a whole bunch of wealth as a result.

He's receiving from Pharaoh sheep and oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels. But as one commentator, Alan Ross, points out, what good did it do to have all the wealth and lose the wife?

What good did it do to have all the wealth and lose the wife? Abram, in an attempt, and remember, this God said he's going to make of them a nation. He needs a wife to bring children into the world so that this promise can come to pass.

Abram, the commentator writes, in an attempt to grasp for the blessing promised by God, jeopardizes that very blessing and receives worldly pleasures instead.

[12:03] Abram says here that he wants it to go well with him. He wants it to go well with him. But it's according to his own definition of well, is it not? He wants it to go well with him for Sarai's sake, because of Sarai.

And he's forgetting that he's received a promise from Almighty God that it will go well with him, truly well. Not because of Sarai, not because of himself, because of God.

God's promised this to him. Okay, so now Abram's in this pickle. His wife is in Pharaoh's household. How does Abram get himself out of this pickle?

Look at the next three words in verse 17. Look at verse 17. But the Lord. Abram does not get himself out of the pickle. God does.

And God brings undeserved deliverance. The Lord afflicts the house of Pharaoh with plagues. Does that remind anybody of another story? The Exodus, right?

[13:07] So Pharaoh, he goes to Abram, and he confronts Abram, and he's essentially like, what were you doing? Why did you tell me? Why this deceit? And how does Abram respond? He doesn't.

Abram has no defense. He has no justification. He's getting rebuked by a pagan king. And so Pharaoh orders Abram to take Sarai and go. He sends Abram away with his wife and all of his possessions that he's acquired in Egypt.

Again, does this remind anybody of anything? The Lord blessing Israel as they leave the land of Egypt. So Moses is doing something. He wants Israel to see, hey, look, look at your story has been repeated.

God's proven himself faithful time and time again. But let's consider, just step back. What just happened? God, through affliction, has put Abram's faith to the test.

And Abram fails the test, right? Abram's operating not in faith, but in fear. And yet, despite his faithlessness, God chose himself to be faithful, right?

[14:11] God, anyway, despite Abram, delivers him from Egypt with his wife, far more possessions than he had when he went down in a famine. Now, saints, just like Abram, God tests our faith for its strengthening.

And he uses affliction to do that sometimes. And yet, even when we falter, God remains faithful. Now, this is the story of so many of us in this room.

And many of you in this room have experienced your own trials of affliction. And you've seen God's faithfulness right in the midst of that affliction. You've seen the faithfulness of the Lord to even bring deliverance from it.

For some of you, there are stories in this room about health struggles that you faced, that the Lord brought you through. For some, there has been financial instability. And God brought you out of that season.

For some, a terrible job situation. Or others, joblessness. For some, it's been mistreatment or abuse or a difficult season of parenting.

[15:19] Whatever it was, saints, you've experienced the faithfulness of the Lord, His strengthening hand, His upholding hand, His ever-present help in times of trouble.

And your faith is stronger today. And so, glory to God. Now, many of you in this room are right now in the midst of various trials of affliction.

Maybe it's one of the ones that I just mentioned. Maybe it's something else, like unwanted singleness, or relational conflict, or family strife, or grieving in the aftermath of loss.

Now, in such afflictions as these, we will probably never fully understand what God is up to, like why He sends trials our way. But He has revealed some of His purpose.

Peter, writing to the persecuted church in 1 Peter 1, phenomenal chapter of the Bible, Peter reminds the church of their unfading inheritance.

[16:25] This is what's awaiting you in heaven. And that inheritance has come through the death and resurrection of Christ. And then he says in verse 6, In this you rejoice, though now, for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials.

And then he gives us a great so that. Okay, this is purpose. So that the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

There is something, Peter is declaring here, that is vastly more precious than gold, than earthly wealth. It is actually faith in Jesus.

That's a precious thing. And such faith, God is strengthening in His saints through the trials of affliction, through fire, that He says it may result one day in praise and glory and honor at Christ's return.

So the question for us this morning, brothers and sisters, is this. In our trials of affliction, will we grasp for control? Will we plan and scheme in self-reliance?

[17:46] Will we compromise our values in an attempt to obtain what we've defined as good? Or will we trust in God? Will we seek the Lord?

Will we submit to His definition of good, which is far better than our definition of good? I promise you that. Will we follow Him no matter the cost? Will we cling to His word and to His promises?

Because He has proven Himself faithful time and again. Will we operate on the plane of fear or on the plane of faith?

I want to tell you a little story. Travis Reimer is a pastor friend of ours at Grace Harbor Church in Providence. And he recently wrote an article that was published online about his own trial of affliction.

Now he's in his 40s and he is currently in the fight of his life. He's been diagnosed with rectal cancer and with lymphoma. He has both cancers right now. And so he describes in this article with transparency how he says, suffering has brought a sense of abandonment, a divine face punch, if you will.

[18:57] He wrestles with doubts. He struggles to believe in the lofty promises of God. As he exhorts people in his office, he's telling them to wait on God and trust in His promises.

And he says he's exhorting himself to do the same thing. He's become well acquainted with the psalms of lament, which cry out to God honestly in pain as we were just singing.

Now perhaps that's what Abram should have done. Lament. Lament the despair and the uncertainty that he was facing in famine.

To ask God, how long, oh Lord? Right? Like, didn't you just promise me all of these amazing things? When are you going to fulfill your word? Perhaps if he had begun in lament, this would have led him to a place of trust in the Lord as he cries out to God in his pain.

Travis Reimer writes, one thing God has been teaching me is that trials are largely about learning to believe in the resurrection. Paul said that he and his coworkers felt that they had received the sentence of death.

[20:08] But this sense of despair had a particular purpose. To make us rely not on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead. 2 Corinthians 1.9.

Travis writes, my trial isn't over yet. I am still finding my way forward and praying the verses on my wall. When I experience noticeable chemo brain, neuropic aches and pains, or when I deal with the side effects of surgery, I am reminded of my frailty.

As I approach the next scan, I fear I'm about to be thrown right back into the fire. I walk with this daily, but so do many of my people. In all of it, God is teaching us not to rely on ourselves, but on him who raises the dead.

What a godly example to us, saints, in our own trials of affliction. May we likewise grow more and more in reliance on the God who raises the dead.

Now for Abram, the faith test number one is a fail. And then God sends another one Abram's way. Here's faith test number two, affluence.

[21:16] Abram and Lot separate. So we see at the beginning of chapter 13, Abram and his now enlarged entourage, they journey back up from Egypt, back to the land of promise, back to, verse four, the place where he had made an altar at the first.

And there, Abram called upon the name of the Lord. So in this, we see return and renewal. Return and renewal. Now God, God, speaking to the Ephesian church through the apostle John in Revelation 2, verse four, he says this to them, but this I have against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

Repent and do the works you did at first. That's what's going on with Abram. By returning to the altar of worship that he had previously built in the land of Canaan, in the land of promise, and then by again calling upon the name of the Lord, Abram's repenting of his faithlessness.

He's renewing his commitment to God. And so this becomes a turning point in the story. Abram is choosing again to forsake the things of this world, to follow hard after God in worship, and in doing that, his perspective is realigned.

It's realigned. He's beginning again to see with the eyes of faith, not fear. And we're going to see how this plays out. But first, how instructive is this for us, saints? Because like Abram, we so often operate in fear rather than in faith.

[22:50] And that leads us to sinful choices. And so like Abram, we need continually to return again to the altar, to repent of our former sin, to renew our commitment in the Lord.

And so brothers and sisters, you can do that right now. You can do that right now in this room. I don't know how you've strayed from the Lord this past week, this past month. I don't know. But I do know that the blood of Jesus Christ flows from Calvary's side like a never-ending supply.

Mercy at the cross. And so, bowing in your heart right now before your Savior, you can repent and you can receive that mercy afresh.

And in reliance on the Spirit today, this morning, you can get back up and you can walk again by faith. Now this return and renewal, it has a direct effect on how Abram responds to this new test. This feuding herdsman we see in verses five through seven. Feuding herdsman. Now thus far, Lot. Lot has been mentioned in this story kind of just as an aside.

[23:55] Okay, we've learned about Lot. Lot is Abram's nephew who's been journeying with Abram since his father, Lot's father, died back in their homeland of Ur.

And then his grandfather, Terah, which is Abram's father, also died back in Haran. And so Lot is joining Abram on this story. Now we're going to see in the next several chapters how Lot is really a character foil for Abram.

Now apparently though, for this story, both Abram and Lot have greatly increased in possessions and so we learn that the land can't support them because they have so much and because they're sort of restricted by the fact that the Canaanites and the Perizzites are living in the land and this leads, verse 7 of chapter 13, to strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock.

So this is sort of the classic, you know, my sheep got here first kind of argument, right? This is our patch of grass. Get back. Now let's just think about this for a second. And kids, and not just kids but adults, we're really good at claiming what belongs to us, right?

Like, I call dibs. Who has a right? Who has dibs on this land? Let's just, let's think about that for a second. Who has the right to claim age before beauty, as my dad used to always say?

[25:21] Or, you know, dude specially chosen by God before sidekick nephew? Like, doesn't Abram have every right to the land? To ask Lot to go find his own patch of grass?

After all, God told Abram to your offspring, I will give this land. Look at verse 8. Then Abram said to Lot, let there be no strife between you and me and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, for we are kinsmen.

It's not the whole land before you. Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right. Or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left. We see uncommon generosity in this.

Uncommon generosity. In spite of Abram's right to the land, and he has a right to the land, he is generously offering Lot first dibs. Right? A change has taken place in Abram's heart and it's leading him to this kind of selflessness.

He's putting Lot's interests over his own. Abram's not operating on the plane of fear anymore. He's operating on the plane of faith. He saw God remain faithful to him, even in spite of his faithlessness.

[26:37] Right? And so he knows God is going to provide for me. God is going to fulfill his word and his promises to me. And so this frees him. Right? It frees him from that former grasping for control.

It frees him from that mode of self-preservation that he was in. He's freed to love and to serve. And so then we see in the next several verses they are diverging paths.

Abram and Lot are going two different directions. Now how should Lot have responded to Abram's offer? Maybe something like, oh, Uncle Abe, thank you for your generosity but I couldn't possibly choose before you.

He shouldn't be choosing before his older uncle who has the promises of the land and yet that's what he does, right? Lot lifts up his eyes. They're probably on a mountain height.

They can see all the valley below them and he sees the fertile Jordan Valley. It says that it's watered like the garden of the Lord and like the land of Egypt and he makes for the greener pastures.

[27:44] Now we might be tempted to defend Lot's choice. This is sort of logical. He's going, he gets first pick, he goes to the nicer land, but the details in here suggest that this is not logical, maybe it's logical but it's selfish and it's foolish.

Again, he should have deferred to Abram but he doesn't. He's looking with physical eyes, he's choosing that which seems to benefit him the most and just think a little bit more deeply, what is he doing?

He's severing himself from the one that God has promised to bless and through whom channel blessing to the world and then he's making for the east. Now the east is symbolic.

We've seen this in Genesis. Adam and Eve were sent east of Eden after the fall and the curse.

Cain, after murdering Abel and being further cursed by God, he settled east.

And then the people of Babel, they were migrating eastward in defiance of the Lord and settled there. And so we need to see east as symbolically representing separation from God, separation from the blessing of God.

[28:54] And then not only the east thing, but he settles in, it says, in the cities of the Jordan Valley. Now, not that cities are bad inherently, but in Genesis so far, we see that cities have been places of wickedness and it says that Sodom is wicked.

And we know about Sodom and Gomorrah, we know what's going to happen in a few chapters when epic judgment comes down in the form of fire and sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah. But Abram, in this sort of stark contrast, he settles in the land of Canaan.

This is the land of promise. It's not well watered like the Jordan Valley. The land of Canaan actually relies on rain from the Lord to bring nourishment, but it's the land of promise. And so Abram's test of affliction was a fail, but now here in this test of affluence, he operates in faith.

He's not clinging to his earthly possessions. Good question. Yeah, no, that's great. Affliction is, it's pain, it's suffering, it's hardship, trial.

Those are just different synonyms and affluence is having a lot. I think about the Apostle Paul says whether well-fed, affluence, or hungry, affliction. I've learned the secret of being content.

[30:13] And so just, yeah, thanks for that question. And so Abram here, he's now relying on God and his word. And he's opening up his hands in this sort of self-giving love and generosity.

And so we too, we undergo trials not just in the good times, but also in hard times. Sorry, not just in the hard times, but in the good times.

In affluence. Now we live in a culture culture that prizes wealth and security, that builds walls of protection against any sort of financial instability, or really any discomfort, or any inconvenience, or any uncertainty.

Now I'm not saying that financial security and earthly possessions in general are bad in and of themselves. The question though is this, does my use of money, does my use of things, does it reveal a faith in God, a faith in his promises, or a reliance on self and a reliance on the things of this world?

See, Abram was freed to love and serve his nephew because he knew God is watching over me. God's made promises to me that he is going to keep.

[31:32] And saints, we have those promises and we have even more than that. Paul says in 2 Corinthians, for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is chapter 8, verse 9. That though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor so that you by his poverty might become rich.

We not only have the promise of eternal salvation and blessing, we also have the self-giving, self-emptying love of God in Christ towards us even while we were yet sinners.

And so the gospel, it frees us from our grasping, it frees us from our consuming to become givers and contributors. And it does that in these two ways that I mentioned.

First, in reminding me that I already have eternal treasures in heaven. I don't need to grasp for things of this world. I have eternal treasures that will never fade. That's the first thing.

[32:34] But the second thing is this, it sets for us an example in Christ's own love, this generous, outpouring love. And Christ calls me to replicate that to the world.

As J.D. Greer writes in his book Everyday Revolutionary, those who have been the recipients of great grace become great distributors of it to others.

And so in our tests of affluence, will we operate in selfishness? Will we operate in preservation of self and grasping?

Or will we operate in self-giving love, in generosity? That is the expression of faith in Christ. That is what faith in Jesus looks like in action. All right, so at this point, Abram has undergone these two faith tests, right?

The first faith test was a fail. The second faith test, he passed. And so again, what's his score at this point? One out of two? Fifty percent?

[33:37] F? Let's see how God responds in verse 14. The Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward.

For all the land that you see, I will give to you and to your offspring forever. I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted.

Arise, walk through the length and breadth of the land for I will give it to you. Number three, the point here is the one ever faithful. God confirms his promises to Abram.

Right? The fact that God is confirming his promises to Abram, despite Abram's failing performance, his 50% performance, is first a sign of God's grace.

This is the grace of God's faithfulness. And so we're reminded once again that the faithfulness that God is showing towards Abram is an expression of free grace that Abram did not deserve.

[34:44] He did not deserve. And friends, this points us just straight again to the cross of Christ. How does it do that? Well, let me ask this. How is it possible that a holy, righteous God could overlook Abram's sin?

Just move forward and reaffirm the promises. It's because 2,000 years later, Jesus would nail Abram's sin to the cross and the sin of all those who would place their faith in him.

In spite of Abram's 50% performance, God 100% affirms the former promises that he made. And he also elaborates on them. And so he sees this land promise is confirmed and sort of expounded on. Now just as Lot, Lot had lifted up his eyes and seen, God tells Abram in verse 10, lift up your eyes. I'm sorry, in verse, we're at 14. Lift up your eyes and look.

Now before, the promise had been to your offspring I will give this land. That's all God had said. Chapter 12, verse 7. Now he says, north, south, east, west, all the land that you see, I will give to you and to your offspring.

[35:55] And he adds this very important word, forever. Whoa. Forever. We'll talk about that. Now Lot had seen with merely physical eyes.

Abram is seen now with the eyes of faith. The land is inhabited, but he trusts God. God's promising this is going to be the eternal inheritance of your descendants. And then in verse 17, God tells Abram to arise, to walk around the ascent of the land.

And that very act, it would signify the sort of transfer of ownership. It's becoming the land of Abram. And I'll bet as he walked through that land, he was envisioning all of his future descendants, his kids and grandkids and great-grandkids that would be populating that area.

Because in verse 16, God confirms the seed promise, the promise of offspring. Now before, God had said, I will make of you a great nation. Chapter 12, verse 2.

Now he gives Abram this analogy. Okay, God is helping Abram's imagination to actually see this. God says, I will make your offspring not just as a great nation, but as the dust of the earth.

[37:09] Picture the dust of the earth. Okay, the desert, arid climate. I will make your offspring like that, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted.

And how does Abram respond? Look at verse 18. Abram moved his tent and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron, and there he built an altar to the Lord.

Abram responds in worship. Now that note about Abram settling by the oaks of Mamre at Hebron, first of all, that reminds the reader of Abram's tent-dwelling lifestyle.

Like he's still a nomad. He's still living in tents. It also hints at the importance of this site, which is going to become central in the chapters to come. But once there, for the third time now, Abram builds this altar of worship to the Lord.

Now last week, in considering our own worship, I read from Romans 12, 1 and 2. Paul tells us to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

[38:19] And I want to ask, do you know what comes before Romans 12? Romans 11. Yes. And not just Romans 11. Romans 1 through 11.

Right? And in Romans 1 through 11, Paul masterfully defends and explains the gospel of Jesus Christ. And that culminates in his own doxology. That's just praise and worship to the Lord.

At the end of Romans 11, Paul breaks out in worship because he is just blown away by the mercy and the wisdom and the glory of God as seen in God's worldwide plan of redemption.

And that plan, Paul revels in. That plan, it involves all the nations of the earth, the Gentiles, like wild olive branches being grafted in to the olive tree, which is God's chosen people, Israel.

And so the Gentiles, the nations, they come to share in the nourishment of the natural olive tree.

And so in other words, friends, we become, when we become sons and daughters of Abraham and heirs of the promises by faith in Christ, we come to be part of the nation of Israel through the gospel.

[39:32] But what does that mean? So as we consider God's promising to Abraham, the land will be your offsprings forever. All right, I'm going to make you a nation as great as the dust of the earth.

What does that mean? Now, I don't have time to talk about all that, but I'll say a little bit, okay? And we're going to keep seeing this. In the Old Testament, we find fulfillment of these promises when Israel multiplies becomes a great nation, comes to possess the land of promise, the land promised to Abraham.

But the language here, the sweeping language of these promises, it always pointed towards something greater to come, something fuller. And we know that in Christ, the greater and the fuller is here, and it will be fully here when he returns.

Last week, we looked at Hebrews 11, the hall of faith, in which the author explains that Abraham, when he answered God's call to leave his homeland and a journey to the land of promise, was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

Now, first we might think he's talking about the earthly city of Jerusalem. But just a few verses later, speaking of all the saints of old, the author says, but as it is, they desire a better country that is a heavenly one.

[41:00] Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city. He's talking about the new Jerusalem. He's talking about the heavenly city that is being

prepared by God as a bride adorned for her husband, the place in which all of God's saints throughout all of the ages will call home.

All those who are sons and daughters of Abraham and sons and daughters of God by faith in Christ from every tribe and tongue and language and nation and in that place, the new Jerusalem, there will be no more death nor mourning nor crying nor pain anymore and behold, God, the Lord God, shall dwell with us and we with him and he will be our God and we will be his people and there, revelation shows us, we will partake of the tree of life which will be for the healing of the nations. Brothers and sisters in Christ, that is the eternal destiny of all of those who right now walk by faith and not by sight. Those who trust in the word and the promises of God made more clear and more sure in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now I long for each of you in this room to be among that number and if you have not repented of your sin and placed your faith in Christ as your Lord and your Savior, then I must warn you that eternal destiny is not yours.

Jesus says that broad is the road that leads to destruction and many are on it. Narrow is the road that leads to life and oh how I would that you were on the narrow road which is faith in Jesus and him alone that leads to eternal life.

[42:45] And you can switch roads today and if you have questions about that please come talk to me. Now for the saints I want to draw to a close here considering how we are called in light of that eternal destiny in the new Jerusalem just like Abram right now to a life of tent dwelling and altar building.

Now I say tent dwelling and some of you are like yes I love camping and some of you are like ah I hate camping. Don't tell me that I am dwelling in tents here in this world. We are Peter says sojourners and exiles he's pointing straight back to the patriarchs and Israel we are sojourners and exiles on earth.

This world is not our home. The places we live are just tents. Paul describes even our physical bodies as just our earthly tents in which we groan.

The thing is so often we live as if our houses and our bodies are permanent. We live as if the things of this world are our only reward our only inheritance as if the money that we store up in stocks or 401ks or in our piggy bank can buy us goods in heaven as if the condition of our houses matters more than the Christ-like hospitality we show in those houses.

We live as if the opinions of men the opinions of others the opinions of co-workers and bosses and fellow church members matters more than the opinions of God's which holds lasting power.

[44:22] Friends, the reality is that all of these things and all of our efforts related to them will go up in flames at Christ's return. only one life yes, only one soon will its fleeting hours be done then in that day my Lord to meet and stand before his judgment seat only one life will soon be passed only what's done for Christ will last.

Saints, God has called us to a life of tent dwelling and like Abram God has called us to a life of altar building. Now this is where we ended last week which is a good place to end any sermon.

One of Shoreline's core values is that we seek to be a church magnifying God's glory. We seek to be a church that zealously pursues the glory of God in everything that we do.

Why? Because it's the reason we were made. During our vision series back in November I said that this core value magnifying the glory of God is sort of like an I am all the Jedi moment for you Star Wars fans.

Right? I am all the Jedi. It's all of the vision principles channeled into that one. If we magnify the glory of God then we're doing everything else. That is the sum and the aim of every core value that we have as a church and it ought to be the sum and aim of all of our individual lives.

[45:48] Peter says but you are a chosen race a royal priesthood a holy nation a people for his own possession you're the new Israel in Christ that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

And that again last week I said worship is our compass. Will this behavior towards my sibling bring glory to God? That's that's what I'm after. Is my speech that I'm about to give to my child in discipline is that glorifying God?

Is that my aim? Is the way that I'm holding myself and my disposition at work is it bringing glory to God? It's always our aim. Is this going to glorify the Lord God?

I just took in criticism. How am I about to respond? Will this actually bring glory to my Savior? Put a spotlight on his excellency and his majesty and his worth. Piper says we're called to make much of God.

That is our purpose. That's how we build altars. We're not building physical altars of stone anymore. Altars with our very lives. Saints, a life of faith is a tent dwelling altar building life.

[47:02] A tent dwelling altar building life. And God in his loving wisdom he sends us tests to strengthen that faith. And yet as we've seen today even when we falter God remains faithful.

What a God of grace that we have. What a God of grace. A God who is worthy of all of our worship. Oh let my love with fervor burn and from the world now let me turn living for thee and thee alone bringing thee pleasure on thy throne only one life will soon be passed only what's done for Christ will last.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father thank you for this word. This true account of your faithfulness to Abraham who is our father by faith in Christ.

And God I ask that you would show us more and more of your grace God each and every single day show us your grace Lord we are recipients of great grace and I pray that that would motivate us to a life of faith.

A life in which we are renouncing things of this world and seeking your glory because we know our eternal destiny in the new Jerusalem in heaven that we long for that day.

[48:27] God in our trials I pray that we would cling to your word and to your promises that we would operate not in fear but in faith.

God we respond right now in worship in Jesus name let me pray. Amen.