

Road Trip

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Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 00] Now, you might like to take the yellow sheet, the Genesis 12 passage that we read, and just have it with you.

I think this is probably the most important passage in all the Old Testament. It's a wonderful and brilliant passage. It comes at a time when the world is in a mess.

There's no hope, and unless God does something, there's really no future. And the promises that God makes in the first three verses, they're like the theme tune for the rest of the Bible.

They're the theme of the rest of the Scriptures. But I'm going to need help this morning in presenting this. It's a family service. There are children here. If you're lucky enough to have a young one with you, I hope you point out what's going on.

I'm going to need some volunteers. I'm going to need an Abraham and a Sarah. I'm going to need one wise guy. I'm going to need a Pharaoh.

[1 : 13] This is your opportunity. This is the Sunday for you to play Pharaoh. And maybe a Harim. Okay, we won't do a Harim.

We're in Canada. It's not good for us to do that. So let's not do that. And I'm going to need... I think that'll do. So let me look around and choose some volunteers, shall I?

I wonder if Jack and Arena, if you would come out and be Abraham and Sarah, please.

This is the right thing to do. And I must say, Oz, I think you've got to be Pharaoh.

Come out the front, Oz. You have got to be Pharaoh. Now, there's costumes here, and Ruth and Celeste are going to costume you up.

[2 : 23] And I think I might get Chris Lay, if you could come and be the wise guy. I'll explain what you are going to have to do. Come over here, Chris. Now, let's dress Abraham and Sarah.

Is that a beard? No. Oh, very good. Chris, if you would come over this way while they're dressing, please. Chris, if you'd come up here in the pulpit.

There are three signs here, and I'm going to ask you to hold up a sign at a particular time. If you'd climb up into the pulpit, and at the moment, I ask you to hold up one of those signs. You'd hold up one, and then the other, and then the third.

Is that okay? Okay. Okay. Okay. Thank you, Jack. Okay.

Now, Sarah, Sarah, I don't know if Sarah needs any costume, does she? She does. Okay. Okay. Very good.

[3 : 29] And what about Pharaoh? Pharaoh. Royal colour. Very good. Very good.

Very good. Very good. Okay. Very good.

Okay. That's very Pharaoh-like. What's that? It was frightful by all the volunteers. You're in the presence of royalty.

Just have some respect. Pharaoh, if you'd come over here, you don't have a lot of action in this. If you'd wait over here in Egypt, just about here, that would be great.

We have pretend camels, and pretend oxes, and asses, and servants as well. But there...

[4 : 29] Okay. I think that's all the costuming we need. Very good. Thank you. A veil if we need it. We're not going to use a veil this morning. Now, I wonder if... The action begins way off in the country of Haran.

Haran. And the chapel over there is Haran. So, if Abraham and Sarah, you'd go over to the country of Haran. Now, you remember, if you've been here for the last few months, through the early chapters of Genesis, God continues to want to bless His people.

And man and woman say no to God. We don't trust you, God. We're going to go our own way. And the world has become a bit of a mess. And Genesis 11 is the Tower of Babel.

People can't talk to each other. People are scattered. It's a bit like it is today. Abraham and Sarah are off there in Haran. Abraham is 75.

Sarah is 65. They're very old. For those days. They have no children.

[5 : 41] It's not possible for Sarah to have children. They are a couple with no future. And you know what the people in Haran do? They worship the moon.

Abraham's not a Christian. They go to moon church. They worship the man and the moon. They celebrate the moon festivals. They don't know the living God. There's very little hope. And then, do you remember, Genesis 12 starts, and God speaks.

And everything changes. It's like the opening chapter of the Bible. When God spoke, there was nothing. God spoke. And now, just like God made the heavens and the earth, it's like a new beginning, a new creation, a new hope.

And what is the first thing that God says to Abraham and Sarah? Leave. You've got to leave Haran. You've got to leave your country and your people.

God doesn't come to Abraham and Sarah and say, relax, I'm going to look after everything. Your comfort is my first priority. He says, get up and walk with me. If you're going to follow me, you're going to go on a journey.

[6 : 51] And he gives them a necessary task to walk to the land that he's going to show them. And off they go to the land. Very important. If you're over 40, your New Year's resolution probably has something to do with comfort and safety.

And if your resolutions are about comfort and safety, not going to work. God has other ideas. There's something more important to God than our comfort and safety as they go on this long journey to the promised land.

What's important to God are the promises that he makes. If you just stop back there, Abraham and Sarah. Now, what are the three promises that God makes to Abraham and Sarah? Mr. Lay, the first is land.

A special place. You look very good in the pulpit, Chris. Can I say? A special place. No longer in the Garden of Eden, but God's desire is still to create a place for people.

That's the first promise. Okay, now boys and girls, if there's anyone under 10, you've been studying this in Sunday school, can anyone tell me what the second promise is? Land.

[8 : 01] What's the second promise or the third? Does anyone know? Just put your hand up. Not water. No, no. That's part of the land. It's a good guess though.

No, what's the second promise? We read it. Got to be under 10. Yes, sir. Sheep. That's part of the land? No. That was part of the land.

What was the second thing God promised? Okay. If you're 15 and under. Do you remember? God promises to Abraham and Sarah over here.

Yes. Children. Thank you. People. That's right. A great people. Abraham and Sarah are too old to have children, but God promises to make a great people, a great nation.

And what's the third thing? Anyone? Yeah. Blessing. Someone called it out. Thank you. Blessing. Five times God says, I will bless you, and I'm going to bless all the world through you.

[9 : 01] So as Abraham and Sarah make their way up to the promised land, all at the front here, all they've got to go on are these three promises from God. They are completely impossible, but Abraham obeys.

The long journey. Impossible, but they trust God. Impossible for God to give them a land. There's no army. Impossible for God to make a great nation.

Impossible to bless the world. So they travel through, and they come to Canaan. They travel through the land of Canaan. And do you know what Abraham does? He builds an altar to the true God.

He goes to the religious sites, the Canaan churches, and outside the churches, if you like, next to the trees, he builds an altar to the Lord God.

A very fine altar. Architecture. And then Abraham and Sarah bow down and worship the Lord.

[10 : 06] Now here's a question for anyone. Why does Abraham build an altar when he comes to the land? Does anyone have a guess at that? Anyone brave enough to have a stab at that? Why would he build an altar?

He builds a couple of altars through the land. Yeah? Is that a hand up? Come again?

It's a witness to the people of Canaan. Yes, it is. Absolutely. Why else would he build altars? Say again?

To thank God. Yeah, it's a thank you to God. He's worshipping. They're worshipping the Lord. Why else? I think it's a way of saying, this land, which is not yet mine, belongs to God.

And the altars in the land are a witness and a testimony and a thank you to God that this is his. So we come to the end of the first half, and it's good, isn't it? Abraham and Sarah have done well, haven't they?

[11:10] Second half? Not so well. Come up fully onto the Mount of Olives here, please, Abraham and Sarah. Now, as soon as, no sooner do they go through the land, then there's a famine.

They're very hungry. Things get very difficult. And Abraham and Sarah get very hungry. They're looking very hungry. How can this be?

How can God do this? How can God allow this to happen? Doesn't God want them to be happy and comfortable? No. Here's a question.

This is for people who are 30 and over. Why would God allow a famine to happen in the land?

Anyone? Yeah. It's a test of their faith.

So what happens? What does he do? He leaves the land. He goes to Egypt. So he takes Sarah, and off they go.

[12:12] And they take their camels, and they take their oxen, and their asses, and they go off to Egypt. Now, let me just push the pause button when they get to the center here.

The reason God sends the test is because faith is not much good. I'll just push the pause button a second later.

That's good. Abraham has an engineering degree. See, you see, when Abraham is in the land, and a famine comes, Abraham begins to say, can I trust God to provide for me here?

Can I stay with God's promise, even though things get really difficult? And Abraham begins to be afraid. Perhaps it's too difficult for me to do this.

So he takes things into his own hands, and he goes to Egypt. And here is the worst speech. Let me tell you what happens. Halfway on the way to Egypt, he turns to his wife, Sarah, and he says this, my wife, Sarah, you are a hot potato.

[13:27] I'm not allowed to say stone-cold fox. That was, you are much too good looking for an old fellow like me.

If we go, if we go to Egypt, the pharaoh, the king there, who has excellent taste in these things, he'll take one look at you, and he'll have me killed.

And he'll add you to the harem. Now, I know God promised to make a great nation out of this, but obviously this is too difficult for God.

So let's just tell this little lie, shall we? You pretend to be my sister. And when we get there, instead of killing me, Pharaoh will say, what a beautiful sister you have, and he'll pay me with camels, and dates, and goats, and more camels, and I'll make some good money out of this.

So they go to Egypt. So Pharaoh, if you would step forward, please. I'm not sure how to do this scene.

[14:37] So they come to Egypt, and Pharaoh and his spies see Sarah from a distance, and say, or more like, and Pharaoh grabs Sarah, and takes her into his harem, and marries her, and then gives to Abraham goats, and sheep, and all sorts of good things.

Now, just like Pharaoh. Now, just, it's awful, isn't it? I mean, what an awful thing to do.

What an awful thing for Abraham to do. To save his skin by sacrificing his wife. But you know what? It's actually very encouraging, not for Sarah, but for us.

Because a guy who is so cowardly, and so selfish as Abraham, God can take him, and make him, into a great man of faith. And here is the question.

If we push the pause button, at this point in the story, what's happened to the promises? Hold up land. Please, Chris. Where is land?

[16:09] Far away. They're in Egypt. Where are the people? Sarah is now Pharaoh's wife. And where's God's blessing? Instead of blessing, what God does, is he rains down diseases, on Pharaoh and his house.

And Pharaoh quickly discovers, that Sarah is Abraham's wife. So he calls Abraham to him, and he says, this is your wife.

What were you thinking? Now go. Sarah and Sarah sighs, a great sigh of relief. And they return to Egypt.

I miss that. I miss that too, I'm sorry.

Now, I just want us to hold this in our hearts for a moment. Two choices Abraham makes. God comes, and his promise sets everything going.

[17:29] First choice, Abraham obeys. Second choice, Abraham takes things into his own hands, instead of trusting God.

Because he has not learned yet, that when God makes a promise, God keeps his promise. In fact, God is the God who will raise the dead. so faithful, is he to his promise.

And Abraham has not yet learned, that even great difficulty, is not something that stops God, but that God keeps working his promises, through the most difficult things for us.

He will keep us, and he will keep his promises to us. And it also means, my friends, that faith, is not just a vague thing, you know, some people have faith, some people don't, I'm a believing person.

Faith is, is belief and trust, in specific promises. Faith is not saying, everything's going to turn out well in the end, I'll just ignore everything. Faith is struggling with the difficulty, and trusting what God has said, the exact things that God has said.

[18:40] So I want us to finish with an exercise, please. If you turn to the back, of your Genesis 12 page, you will find, a little passage, and in that passage, there are a number of promises from God.

And I wonder, if you feel, if you feel comfortable with this, if you don't feel comfortable with it, don't do it. If you feel comfortable, if you would turn to two people, just make a little threesome, in your seat, at the end of the pew, there are pencils, and if you would hand a pencil to one person, if you would just identify, what the specific promises from God are, in that passage, we're going to finish with this, and I will ask some people to tell us, what promises they discovered, in those passages. We'll take five minutes on this. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. It would be most helpful, if you could put the promises in your own words.

[22:10] Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. If this is your first time with us, we do this every week.

And we collect the papers at the end. Well, now, there are some wonderful promises.

There are actually two passages that I've assigned on the back of these different sheets. One is John chapter 6, and the other is very familiar, Psalm 23.

I wonder if there's someone in a group who has looked at John 6, who would like to tell us one or two of the promises that they see there in their own words.

[24:00] Now, the reason I'm doing this is that when we read God's words, sometimes we come across promises. We don't trust God to make us rich.

We don't trust God to keep us free from trouble. We trust God to do what he promises. So, if there's someone who's had a look at John 6, is there anyone brave enough to stand up and say one or two of the things they discovered there?

Who did John 6? Okay. Tracy, what did you discover? Yep.

The one who comes to me, I will not cast out, Jesus says.

All who come to me, I will not cast them out. Isn't that a great promise? If you come to Christ, he will not drive you away. He will not cast you out. It doesn't matter what you do.

[25:02] Anything else from John 6? Yeah. The Father will provide for all our needs.

Yes, indeed. Very interesting. Our needs. Yes, thank you. Anything else? Right.

What are the actual words? What are the actual words there, Hugh? Isn't that fantastic?

You look to the Son and believe in Him and you have eternal life. Do you believe God is going to raise you up on the last day? That's a specific promise from Christ. Thank you.

Now, what about Psalm 23? I suppose everyone else did Psalm 23. Let's hear one or two of the promises from Psalm 23. Does someone want to say something in their own words? Yes, sir. Thank you.

[26:16] We will live in the Lord's house forever. What do you think that's talking about? What do you think that means?

Do you think it might be talking about heaven? Yeah, I think it's talking about heaven. Thank you. Are there any other promises other than just heaven in Psalm 23?

Yeah. Big voice. Protection. Exactly. What else? He will never forsake us.

What's another one? From Psalm 23. He provides for us. What else? What does He provide for us here? Everything we need.

He provides specifically here. What does He say? He makes me lie down in green pastures.

[27 : 30] He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores. He renews me. He refreshes me. And what about the valley of the shadow of death? What does He say?

I will be with you. I will walk beside you. Every single person here who is a follower of Jesus Christ. As we die, the promise is that the Good Shepherd, He's not just in front and behind.

He walks beside us through that experience. That is a specific promise here. And we can trust Him. So let me finish and just say this one thing.

Next, tomorrow begins a new year. You and I are walking with God on a pilgrimage. And what guides our walk is that God has made promises.

And those promises, He is faithful and He will keep them. And you and I need to trust Him. That is the most important thing for us this year. Let's kneel and pray.

[28 : 32] It's David.