

Obey God By Faith

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Date: 30 August 1987

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[0 : 00] Our God and Father, we ask your presence with us as we turn to your word, that you by your Holy Spirit may take your word and use it to point us to the person of Jesus Christ.

And in Christ we pray that we might see the Father. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. It's the beginning. It's the beginning of the story of Abraham. And so I have to take this beginning and use it to draw a conclusion. And I'm happy to do that.

Look at the text itself, if you will. You will recall last week Dr. Pecker preached on Genesis chapter 11 and the building of the Tower of Babel.

And that chapter goes on to do some wonderful things in terms of giving you some, well, some history of peoples.

[1 : 33] God is primarily interested in people. And some of these are very obscure people that God used. If ever you were asked to read this passage in public service, I would try and avoid it if I was you.

Because the names are somewhat difficult. However, it comes on down and ends with Terah, who lived 70 years, became the father of Abraham, Nahor, and Haran.

And Haran died, leaving a son whose name was Lot. And Terah took Abraham and his wife Sarai. Abram and Sarai and Nahor and his wife. And they went to a place called Haran, which is the same as his brother's name.

And there they remained until Terah died. And when Terah died, chapter 12 begins.

[2 : 42] And it begins with the call of Abram. And in a very matter-of-fact way, the scriptures record for us that the Lord said to Abraham, Go.

And Abraham went. And that becomes really the prototype of every follower of God since that time. That God says to you, Go, and you find it in your heart, by faith, to do what God says, to obey him. And so Abraham was called to go. It wasn't his obedience that fills the next paragraph, though.

It's God's provision for him as he goes. Look at it carefully, and you will see that he is to go from his country, his kindred, his father's house.

[3 : 52] That is, he is to cut those things off, leave them behind. But he is to go to the land that the Lord will show him, that God will make of him a great nation, that God will bless him, that God will give him a great name.

My esteemed friend, Mr. Jeff Greenman, pointed out that back in Genesis chapter 11, the people who built the Tower of Babel tried to make a great name for themselves.

In chapter 12, God gives to Abraham the promise of a great name, that he would be a blessing, that those who blessed him would be blessed, those who cursed him would be cursed, and through him all the families of the earth would bless themselves.

Or, in him all the families of the earth shall be blessed. So the Lord makes a wonderful provision for Abraham as he goes.

And it is the intention, I'm sure, of God, when he tells you to go, that he will similarly provide in a wonderful way for you.

[5 : 19] Well, verse 4 then of chapter 12, says that Abraham went, as the Lord had told him. He still had Lot with him, his nephew.

He was 75 years old, which presumably means that he knew what he was doing. And, though that doesn't always happen, I suppose, Abraham took Sarah, his wife.

Sarai, his wife. Remember, their names have not as yet been changed. That comes later on in the story, where Abram becomes Abraham, and Sarai becomes Sarah.

He took Lot, he took all the possessions, which with his father Terah, he had taken to Haran, from Ur of the Chaldees.

And then he goes with his possessions, his wife, his nephew, and the people that had been born to their company when they had gone to Haran, and they set forth to go on that ancient route, which marks the center of the world, the route from Ur of the Chaldees to the land of Israel, or Canaan. [6 : 48] When they came to the land of Canaan, Abraham passed through the land, because it wasn't his yet, it was only his by promise, and he came to the place called Shechem, to the Oak of Morah, which was thought perhaps to be a place of some religious significance, and it became, from this moment on, a place of great religious significance, because there, the Lord appeared to Abram and gave him a promise.

Abram had obeyed, had done what the Lord had told him to do, now the Lord meets him at the end of that journey, and gives him the promise, verse 7, to your descendants, I will give this land. And that simple promise keeps our world on its ear from that day to this, virtually without interruption. But there it is.

I will give you this land. And in response, Abram built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him.

That is, he marked the spot carefully. You will see again in verse 8, that from there he removed to the mountain on the east of Bethel, which became a famous place when Jacob spent the night dreaming there.

[8 : 29] Abram was there first, and there he pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east, down south of Jerusalem.

So he's traveling in a north to south direction. When he got to that second place, he again built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord.

In the beautiful commentary on Genesis by Derek Kidner, he points out, and I think it's well worth your noticing, that he pitched a tent but built an altar.

So that should show you where your value system should be. Most of us pitch an altar in some distressed point in our lives, but what we're building is our own security.

He pitched a tent, which was a transitory place of dwelling, and he built an altar, which was established in rock for all the ages.

[9 : 50] And Abraham journeyed on, still going toward the Negev, he was a nomad now, he had flocks and herds with him, he subsequently divided the land, and this is the beginning of the story of Abram's obedience to God.

And the picture of Abram's obedience to God is the basic story at the root of the whole of the Jewish faith, the whole of the Muslim faith, and the whole of the Christian faith.

This story of this man. And so he's a tremendously important person. There is, in the history of this city, a very important bunch of daffodils.

Now, this bunch of daffodils was taken in, I think, the month of February from Vancouver by a businessman who was traveling out here back to his wife in Saskatchewan.

Now, daffodils in Saskatchewan in February are a wonder to behold, particularly 60 or more years ago when this took place.

[11 : 22] And that wife, in response to that bunch of daffodils, said, we're moving to Vancouver. That was her call, and she obeyed it and moved here.

And now, even in these very pews, there is a family, which is one of the great families in the history of Vancouver's business and industry, which, that are here simply because of that tiny and almost insignificant event.

And you will notice, I hope, that Abram's call is a tiny and almost insignificant event but it has changed the whole course of history because this man to whom God spoke and called to go believed him in faith and did what he was called to do.

And I would like to give you every assurance that the way God will work in your life is not by building a great tower or a huge city he will work in a way so simple, so simply as to utterly confound you. His orders will be so direct and so simple that you can't mistake them except because you are an extremely wise, intelligent, sophisticated, and rational person that you are altogether likely to superciliously overlook them.

[13 : 07] But the command will be simple and direct and you will be asked to obey. So that's how it all began and out of this story you get this story being used when after the death and resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, the preachers and the acts of the apostles wanted to tell people what had happened and they said Abraham believed by faith.

And then when Paul started to write his great treatise on what it was to receive the grace and mercy of God, he said it is as Abraham believed God in faith and it was counted to him as righteousness. And in Galatians, Paul again tells the story of Abraham to explain to you how the Christian life works. And in the epistle to the Hebrews, again the same thing happened.

He says look at Abraham and you will understand how Christian faith works. And I'm going to tell you three things which should mark your life insofar as you are a child of Abraham.

A child of Abraham not by blood perhaps but through faith in Jesus Christ. There are three things that will mark your life insofar as you are a believer.

[14 : 50] The first is that you have received a call from God which you have attempted albeit perhaps not as well as you would like to have attempted but you will have responded in faith to that call.

That God through the gospel of Jesus Christ has called you to come and follow to take up your cross and follow him as Archie preached about this morning.

The call belongs to you and it comes from God and it is uniquely to you and you uniquely must hear it and you uniquely in your own heart must respond to it and you must recognize that this bunch of daffodils experience so to speak this tiny insignificant event will change the whole course of your life.

The second thing that you need is to recognize that you are under a covenant. Abraham went from Haran to Shechem to the oaks of Morah and there he built an altar because that was where God made him a promise and in order to keep God to his word he built an altar there and in order to keep himself reminded of God's promise he built an altar there so that the covenant between him and his God would be certainly established and that what you and I need is the recognition of the covenant which exists between us and God and wherever we're going and wherever we're whatever we're doing wherever we find ourselves we rebuild as it were the altar to remind ourselves of the covenant which God has made with us in Christ the promise that he's made to us the promise by which we live and the promise on which we depend that we have a call from

God we have a covenant with God we pitch our tent but we build that covenant relationship with God that's what we build our life around and we have to come back to it over and over again maybe we'll do it at the coffee somebody told me a couple of weeks ago somebody who is in this congregation tonight as I proceed that they would dare me to preach on why you should go to church on Sunday rather than go windsurfing there's some good material to look at that question in this text tonight and if it doesn't immediately occur to you how it applies we'll deal with it in the discussion the third thing that we have is the call of

[18 : 18] God the covenant which goes with Abraham wherever he goes that's what he builds into his life the reality of that covenant and the third thing that he has is a city remember how in in Genesis chapter 11 they they say to themselves in chapter 11 verse 4 come let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top and the heavens and let us make a name for ourselves lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth and so this huge construction project went became was undertaken with slaves and stone and soil and mud and and masons and everybody coming together trying to establish something which would last for a thousand ages and would be something that would make this people that started out in that way a people whose names would be praised through all the generations of history they would do something infinitely great they would build a city they built a city in chapter 11 in chapter 12

God called Abraham the whereabouts of that city probably couldn't be found if all the archaeologists in all the world were to try and dig and find it somewhere but what God began in the call of Abraham is part of every continent and island on the whole of this planet and has been preached and read about and studied and examined and has moved men because it begins with God notice in Hebrews chapter 11 verse 8 the difference between the city of Genesis chapter 11 and the city which Abraham was concerned about when in chapter 11 verse 8 of Hebrews as opposed to chapter 11 verse 4 of Genesis you read by faith

Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance and he went out not knowing where he was to go by faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a foreign land living in tents with Isaac and Jacob heirs with him of the same promise for he looked forward to the city which had foundations whose builder and maker is God a very different kind of a city and that's the city that we're called to and we spend most of our time and most of our energies in the most fatuous attempt to repeat what was frustrated by God in Genesis chapter 11 and we

haven't really got hold of what was established by God in Hebrews chapter 11 a city which has foundations whose maker and builder is God so we have a call to follow God we have a covenant of promise to live by as we follow him and we have an ultimate objective which transcends the whole of human history because from the city of death in which we must live out our lives we look for a city which has foundations whose maker and builder is God and that's how we're to live our lives it's not I might say a kind of instant remedy it takes a few thousand years to come into its fullness and the purposes of God may if God spares us go on being fulfilled in human history until that city until we come to that city until we by faith are brought to that city it goes on a long time so that the very quietness of God's call of Abraham the very intimacy of God's covenant with Abraham and the joy of the prospect of the city which hath foundations are the things by which we live as the children of Abraham those who by Christ are called and covenanted and look for a city and that's the way the story of Abraham begins and really in the scriptures it doesn't end but we end the series in Genesis there and pray that God may bless them and the preaching that's been done through this summer to all of us let's pray for a moment Amen A