

God Calls Abram

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Date: 09 May 2010

Preacher: Rev Kenneth I Macleod

[0 : 00] Let's turn again to the chapter we read in the book of Genesis, Genesis chapter 12. And reading at the beginning, these are, I suppose, well-known words where we find the very center words, in a sense, to even where we are to this very day.

The call of Abraham. Now the Lord said to Abraham, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And 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 the families of the earth shall be blessed. Now, as we know, faith is absolutely essential to the Christian life.

This man, Abraham, was known for his faith. There are different people in the Bible. They are known for different things. Abraham was certainly a man who was known for his faith.

And faith is at the very center of the Christian life. In fact, there's a version of the Bible that's very challenging.

[1 : 29] And it tells us that without faith, it is impossible to please God. That's an amazing statement. But that's a statement that God has given to us.

That without faith, it is impossible to please God. Now, we're told in the Bible that sometimes, for the believer, that faith can be strong.

Other times, it can be weak. Other times, it's referred to as little faith. We find Jesus speaking in that way, O ye of little faith, those who had your faith was being weak.

But the fact is that there is faith. And faith is what is essential and what is vital and important for our life.

If there is no faith, there is no spiritual life. By grace, you are saved through faith. Faith is taking God at his word.

[2 : 27] It's believing God, even when providence, when circumstances of life, might be going in another direction altogether.

Believing God, believing his word, laying hold upon what he has said, persuaded that what he says is true, irrespective of what is happening at the actual moment.

And the thing is that when and where there is faith, it will be tried. Because the trial of our faith is essential. Faith is like a muscle, and it is through exercise that it grows.

And the Lord will see to it that that faith will be tried. And at the end of the day, faith is not just something that we talk about and study, but we live.

You know, it's one thing to talk about these things and to study them. It's another thing to live them. And this man, Abraham, was a man who lived by faith. He displayed tremendous faith throughout his life.

[3 : 32] Yes, he had his failures, but he was a great man and is rightly remembered for his faith and indeed is termed the father of the faithful.

He was a man who trusted God against what we would say against all the odds. Trusted God when he was in the total darkness. Trusted God when everything appeared to be going in the very opposite direction.

Now, we're told that Abraham had lived in other Chaldeans. And in fact, if we were to put that in a modern context, that would be in Iraq, where Iraq in the land, it would be about 180 plus miles south of Baghdad, was where Abraham lived.

And Abraham, as we see, was from a family of idolaters. And we know that if we go to the book of Joshua, because we read in the book of Joshua, it says there, And that they served other gods would indicate that they were all idol worshippers.

And we find that in chapter 11, that Tira, Abraham's father left Ur and came to Haran. He wanted to go to Canaan, but he stopped in Haran, which is, that's where Turkey is.

[5 : 02] That's, well, I shouldn't say that's where, but that's, Haran would be in Turkey. And so we find that this man, Abraham, whose name was later changed to Abraham, had God come to visit him.

It's very simply told us here, Now, the Lord said to Abraham, But if we go to the book of Acts, and it's wonderful how the scripture sheds light on scripture. You know, some people say, Well, I would love to find a really good commentary.

And by all means, and everybody, we all want to find really good commentaries. We love to find a really good commentary on any book in the Bible. But you know, in many ways, the greatest commentary on the Bible is itself.

Because so often we find that in another book, something will highlight or shed light on something else. And that's what we find here, because it doesn't tell us in this particular part that Abraham came from an idol-worshipping family, but the book of Joshua does.

It doesn't tell us how God, first of all, revealed himself to Abraham here, but in Acts of the Apostles, it does. We're told in Acts chapter 7, The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham and said, Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you.

[6 : 31] We read there, The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham. Now, I suppose people may ask and say, Well, why did he appear to Abraham?

Well, was it because Abraham was the best man who lived there? Did God see that this man, Abraham, would be somebody that it would be worth appearing to?

Well, we cannot answer that question in any wise, because God is sovereign. God always takes the initiative. It doesn't appear anywhere that Abraham was waiting for this visit or expecting this visit. God, just in his glory, appeared to Abraham. He visited Abraham. And he did so according to his own sovereign will.

And he did so for his own good pleasure and for his own glory. And there are many times that's where we've got to stop, because we can't go beyond that.

[7 : 36] And God is sovereign in all his dealings. Just as God was sovereign in his dealings with Abraham, God is still sovereign to this day. And you in here, my believing friend, it is because of God's sovereign love to you that you are where you are.

God appeared to you. Maybe, I don't know how he appeared to Abraham, but God has appeared to you as well.

He visited you. He visited you in the gospel. He drew you. The initiative, let us remember, is always of him. The Bible tells us that we love him.

Why? Because he first loved us. And we've always got to remember that the initiative is with the Lord.

He planned it. He purposed it. He is the one who comes to us. And let me say, if you're here today without the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, thank the Lord that you're here.

[8 : 46] We live in a day where many, many people don't go to church. The vast majority don't go to church. The majority in this town don't go to church. But you're here.

God in his providence, God in his own initiative in your life, has seen fit that you are here today. And when you think about that, it's a wonderful thing.

Because there are many who have no desire, whatever, to be in God's house today. The initiative is always with the Lord.

And the Lord draws near. And the Lord touches people's hearts. And the Lord softens people's hearts. And the Lord works in people's hearts. Sometimes so quickly, and other times it appears so gradually.

But there's this. Maybe there's some in here today, and that's exactly what's happening with you. I don't know. But there's a growing, a drawing, an inclination to the things of God that didn't used to be there.

[9 : 53] But you find yourself, and you're saying to yourself, there is a warming to the things of God going on in your heart. Well, let us remember all these things that it is of God.

And you know, the great thing is that when God begins a work, He will complete it. God doesn't begin a work and then say, as we often do, I shouldn't have started that.

Or I don't have the resources to finish it. Or I'm tired. Or it's too much for me. You know how often we begin something and we say to ourselves, I wish I had never started with this, particularly if it's something that's difficult.

That's never so with the Lord. And irrespective of how difficult a person may be, and at a human level, how challenging a person may be, God begins a work and He completes that work and He will fulfill that work.

And we see here, as God comes to Abraham, we see something of the certainty of God's purposes. Because God speaks in such an emphatic way, such a positive way, a way of absolute certainty and commitment.

[11:07] And He says to Abraham, you notice how often God is saying, I will. Go from your country and your kindred to your father's house to the land that I will show you. The Lord is saying, I will show you.

And I will make of you a great nation. Not you yourself, Abraham. You're not going to make a great nation of yourself. I am going to do what the Lord is saying to him.

And I will bless you. That's what He says. 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 the families of the earth shall be blessed. So you see how God has come to Abraham, taken the initiative, come in His glory, and He's saying to Abraham, I am going to do wonderful things in you, through you, for you.

But it's all of me. Abraham, He says, I'm going to make of you a great nation. And how true that has become. For many years, as far as Abraham was concerned, it seemed very unlikely because you remember that for years and years they had no family.

[12:25] And we know the story. We're not going to go down that road today. But you remember how it was when it had become impossible. Abraham and Sarah had become so old that it had appeared that it would be impossible for Abraham and Sarah to have any children.

And yet God was going to make of Abraham a great nation. And that has been fulfilled at two levels. At a natural level because the Jewish race has come from Abraham.

At a natural level, he is, and that is why to this very day, he's so revered by the Jews. But also at a spiritual level, he is the father of the faithful.

And he is, in a sense, in the spiritual church, he's looked upon as a father. So when the Lord spoke to Abraham, here's this man who had been in idolatry, the Lord says to him, you know, Abraham, if you could see the finished result, if you could see into glory when at the end of the world.

And you will see a multitude that no man can number. And this is the beginning. You are the very first stone in this building that I am going to build.

[13:47] Of course, well, we know that Christ is the foundation stone. But at a human level, here we have Abraham. And that's why he's termed the father of the faithful.

And also the Lord says to him, Abraham, I'm going to make of you, you're going to have a great name. Now again, at a human level, Abraham would have died in his tent.

Relatively unknown. His family knew him, his friends knew him, the people round about knew him. But by and large, you could say he died in obscurity.

And yet to this very day, the name of Abraham is known. God made sure that his name would be great. In fact, we sang there in Psalm 112, the righteous man's memorial shall everlasting prove. You know, there's a lot of people today in this world and they want to make a name for themselves. You hear people saying they want to make a name for themselves. In all honesty, with my hand and my heart, I can't understand that.

[14:52] I have no desire in the world to make a name for myself. The only name I'm concerned about is that my name is in the Lamb's book of life. That's what we should be concerned about.

But the Lord is seen to it and he's seen to Abraham. Although you may, you may not think very much about yourself and you may die, as it were, in obscurity.

Your name, I will make. And that's what the Lord has done. He's made his name great so that people down throughout the generations, hundreds of thousands, indeed millions of people, know all about the name of Abraham.

They know about him. It's almost as if they had met him. We're so familiar with the story of Abraham. That frontiersman of the faith who has thrilled our heart, who has excited us, who has stimulated us.

Remember how it tells about in Hebrews chapter 11 about the cloud of witnesses? Well, there is Abraham. He's part of the cloud of witnesses. And the Lord also says that he's going to bless all the families of the earth through his family.

[16:01] Now, of course, this was a reference to Jesus Christ. This was where the universal blessing was going to come. In you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed because it is down through this direct line at a human level that Jesus Christ comes into this world.

And as we know, the great blessing, the universal blessing throughout all the nations and every time any person is taken out of any community, well, even supposing our own community here, any person who comes to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, we see here the fulfillment of that promise. In you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed. The day you came to faith in Jesus Christ was a fulfillment of that promise. When God said that to Abraham all these years ago, the day each one of us came to faith in Jesus Christ, that promise was being fulfilled.

Now, of course, there's a lot of other things we could say here, but at this particular moment, another thing we see about this visit that the Lord, where the Lord appeared to Abraham was it was a very personal visit.

God's dealing with Abraham was very personal. I don't think anybody else knew that the Lord had appeared to Abraham.

[17:33] You see, it was very, very personal the way that the Lord came. And that's the way the Lord works with people. It's personal. Very, very individual.

Very, very personal. The Lord might be working in a soul in here today savingly. Nobody else knows.

But at this particular time, at this particular juncture, the Lord is working in your soul. And that's an awesome thing. And you know, sometimes even you can have it that people will be saying, ah, you know, we're living in a dark day.

The Lord's power is gone. There's nothing happening. And at the same time, people lamenting like that, and the Lord's at work, saving souls. We've got to be very careful in what we say.

So here it was, very private, very personal. But the thing is, it's life changing. Abraham's life was changed, changed all, radically changed. And you know, whenever the living God meets with anybody, that's what happens.

[18:41] People's lives are changed. A new inclination is born in your heart, new desires. You know, sometimes people say, I could never follow the Lord.

Well, you know, when you're unconverted, that is actually true. That you couldn't, you say to yourself, you know, you look and you say, you know, there might be a desire within your heart, and you're saying, I would love to be a Christian, but you know, I don't think I could really follow the Lord.

You might have these thoughts now and again. You cannot in your own strength, let me tell you. It's impossible for a passion. Well, I think it's impossible for a passion.

It certainly is. It's impossible by the way of grace, as we're taught in the scripture, but it's impossible for somebody to say, well, I'm going to become a Christian, and I'm going to make myself follow the Lord, just that's it, and I'm going to, I'm going to, that's it, I'm going to do that all in my own strength. You can't. You see, we use this word converted, and that's what conversion is. It turns you around. It's turning your heart around, so that things that you thought were impossible, all of a sudden become possible.

[19:57] there's a change that takes place, and it's an ongoing change, the change that starts, continues. Sometimes we see it radically worked in people's lives, other times it's not nearly so radical from a human point of view.

In other words, say for instance somebody who grew up in the church from their earliest days, and they were always in church and always had been in Sunday school and through all the different youth activities and they lived a decent life and then come to faith in Jesus Christ.

It doesn't seem so surprising to others, and yet it's the same thing that is needed. It is the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the work of the Holy Spirit applying the work of Jesus to that person's heart.

But then there are other people who maybe are outside the community or people who were once in the community and tend to be more on the outside, and then they're saved. It might appear to others to be more powerful, more radical.

But anyway, a classic example is Saul of Tarsus. Remember Saul. Saul was hammering, hammering down, Saul was hammering down the road to Damascus with hatred for the Christian in his heart, with enmity, breathing out slaughter, he wanted the Christians dead.

[21 : 21] and the same Lord who appeared to Abraham. The Lord of glory, the Lord in his glory appeared to Saul.

It all changed. The enmity was broken. The rebellion died. The hatred gave way to love. And very soon you find this Saul who was hammering down the road with attitude and intent and hatred in his heart and he's saying, oh Lord, what will you have me to do?

See the change? Absolute radical change. And that's what the Lord does. He changes people's hearts because the glory of God appeared.

But we also find here that what the Lord called Abraham to, again at a human point of view, was very difficult. He says, go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

In other words, Abraham's life was going to be thrown upside down. Everything that he was used to, it was going to go.

[22 : 30] He was used to a particular culture, he was going to have to leave it. He was used, no doubt, to a particular language, he was going to have to walk away from it. He was used to the particular home that he lived in and the environment that he was in, he was going to have to leave it.

And he didn't even know where he was going. The Lord says, on you go. The Lord didn't say to him then where he should go. He said, I will show you. Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

In the meantime, Abraham, what I want you to do is to get up and to go. And as you go, I will reveal to you, I will show you where I want you to go. That was faith.

And for Abraham, you can see that he was taken absolutely out of his comfort zone. And sometimes that's what the Lord asks us to do as well.

Challenges us to get out of our comfort zone. He doesn't do it just for the sake of doing it.

Sometimes the Lord will call us and ask us to do things that will take us completely out of what we're familiar with.

[23 : 42] these things can be difficult. And you know, we have a choice in life of what we do when the Lord challenges us.

We either will accept and listen to what the Lord asks us to do and go with it or else we can refuse. And you know, I think the person who disobeys, who disobeys what the Lord asks them to do will never really enjoy peace in this life in a sense.

They will always be troubled by that disobedience. There will always be the regret. They are saying, I should have done what the Lord told me to do. Quite often you will hear Christians later on in life saying, you know, I know what the Lord asked me to do and I didn't do it.

And I always think it's an awful sad thing when we hear people speak like that. When the Lord asks us to do something, we've got to go and do it. And that's what Abraham did.

[24 : 52] And that's part of what makes him this great man, this great man of faith. It was difficult. And you know, sometimes, again, the same thing can be true for a person becoming a Christian.

Sometimes it will be so radical. Your way of life may change to a certain extent. Even sometimes your circle of friends.

Even your home. You know, there are many people in this world, if they become a Christian, they know that their home is no longer their own.

They know they're out. They're going to be expelled from their home. That is hard. That is hard. And yet, that is what Jesus is asking us to.

Now, we find here that Abraham went out, and as we say, he went out in the dark. But you know, the great thing was this, that God blessed Abraham. And you know, the great thing about Abraham's life, as you look at it, is that Abraham, because he was living in God's promises, was always looking ahead.

[26 : 01] He was a man who was looking ahead. And you know, that's the way we go. Isn't it? The Christian is somebody who's looking ahead. Why? Because Christ is ahead of us, and the great things are yet to come.

You know, the Christian's life is a life where there's a great future. Those who are out of Christ don't have a great future. There's nothing ultimately.

people are long. You know, when a person gets old and they're out of Christ, they have nothing really to look forward to. If we're in Christ, we have everything to look forward to.

And that's part of what made Abraham the great man. Because you just see him moving on, moving on, always moving on, because God was before him.

God's promises were before him. God was his future. Is that the way we're going? Or are we stuck where we are? May we have the spirit of Abraham, who rust all by following the Lord, and who was so blessed by the Lord, and who in turn became a blessing to all.

[27 : 24] And you know, if we are faithful to the Lord, and follow the Lord, he will see to it. It's not that we ourselves do it. He will see to it that we will be a channel of blessing to others as well.

Let us pray. Oh, Lord, our God, we give thanks for this great word, a word that speaks to us of great people, great, and yet all these people were made great because of our great God who came to them.

And we pray that this same great God may be in us and upon us, and we give thanks for our work, which begun, will prosper.

We pray then to bless us with all spiritual and temporal blessings. Do us good, we pray. Bless us in our bodies, our minds, and in our souls, our homes, our families, and all whom we love.

Part us now with thy blessing, we pray. Take us to our homes safely. In Jesus' name we ask all. Amen.