

God Calls Abram

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[0 : 00] We're going to begin our worship by singing to God's praise. We're singing in Psalm 16, in the Sing Psalms version, Psalm 16 on page 16. We're going to sing from verse 1 to verse 7.

Protect me, O my God, you are my refuge through. I said, you are my Lord, I have no good apart from you. The godly in the land for holiness renowned, they are the glorious ones in whom all my delight is found. We'll sing from verse 1 to verse 7, and the tune is Selma.

Amen. My Lord, I have no good apart from you. The godly in the land for holiness renowned, they are the glorious ones in whom all I delight is found. Their sorrows will increase, who on force God's divine.

I will not sacrifice to them, their worship I define.

O Lord, you are to me, my cup and portion sure. The shame that is assigned to me, you God and he, the Lord, I have no good apart from you. The Lord, I have no good apart from you. The Lord, I have no good apart from you.

[2 : 42] The Lord, I have no good apart from you. The Lord, I have no good apart from you. The Lord, I have no good apart from you. the appointed To me is God divine.

I'll praise the Lord my God, whose counsel guides my choice.

And be there in the land of my heart, bring all the expressions of joy.

Let's bow our heads in a word of prayer. Let us pray. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

[5 : 01] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. our people to yourself. And so we thank you that as your call is here this evening, it is also all around us, that you are a God who is calling our people near and far to come and follow you. For we see that your voice is heard, not just through your word as we have it before it, although we acknowledge that that is your special revelation to us. But we thank you too that you reveal yourself to us through your very creation, through the heavens and the earth and all that we see of your glory around us. For it reminds us that you are our maker, that you are our keeper, that you are the one who has made all things, that you are the one who will call all things to an end, that you are the one who has given our days to number them and to be wise with them. And so we pray this night,

O Lord, that as we see and hear your call to us, that you will give us the heart to be obedient to that call, to hear it and to follow you. To follow you, Lord, through whatever paths you have in store, to follow you in whatever work you have for us, to call you above all to look to Jesus and to put our trust in him. And to know in him the one who is our security and our salvation, now and for eternity. And so we praise you for your call. We praise you for your word. And we ask your blessing anew on it this evening, that you will speak to each of us, not just collectively as a congregation, but individually, whether we are sitting here in the building, whether we are listening online, whenever we might hear your voice, that you would give us an ear to hear and a heart to respond.

And so we pray, Lord, that you would bless us and watch over us as a people. We do pray, O Lord, that as we go forward from here, that you will be a God who leads us and guides us. We thank you for, as we come to your word this evening, the reminder of Abraham, who was one who you called, but also one who you led, one who you showed the way he was to go, the one who was able to look, not to the cities of this world, but to a city whose maker and builder was God. And we ask, O Lord, that you will give us the eyes of faith that Abraham had, and so many like him as well, that we would continue to fix our eyes on you, that you would be the one that would guide our every step and lead us in every way. And especially as we enter into a period of change as a congregation, as we think of a time of vacancy and the need to be led by you, we pray that you will give us a spirit of prayer, that you will fill our hearts, O Lord, with that longing to know you, to worship you, first and

foremost, and then to seek you and to know your guidance, to know your help, to know you speaking to us as a people, as a congregation, as a community, that you would guide us, O Lord, that the vacancy would be filled in your time and by your person. So we ask, O Lord, that in all things we will look to you, and we thank you for all that we have around us to help and to encourage, that you give us that spirit of prayer, that spirit of unity, that bondness of encouragement to one another and loving one another. And we pray that you will increase these things in our midst, so that we will be a congregation that would be said of, that see how they love him, see how they love Christ, and how they love one another. And so we pray, Lord, for you to lead us in these ways. And we pray for the Reverend Colin McLeod as he will become into the moderator. We ask, O Lord, for help and strength to him in his own congregation and back, and also as he assists here as well. May he know your help and your strength throughout these days and months ahead. We pray too, Lord, for our leadership as a Kirk session and as a deacon's court. We pray, Lord, for you to give us wisdom and guidance and help in all our discussions going forward as well. We pray that you will unite us together.

[10:00] We pray for a vacancy committee as it's formed. We ask, O Lord, for your wisdom in that and for guidance among all of us as a congregation to consider prayerfully who will come and preach, who we would long to have among us, who would be a shepherd over us. So, Lord, we pray for your blessing and your help in that. We thank you, Lord, that your promise is that you will be with us, and we pray that we will keep hold of your promises at all times. And we ask above all, Lord, for your ministry, for your gospel work to flourish in our midst. As was once said, there is no such thing as a vacant congregation when God is in their midst. And we thank you for that, that your work goes on, that we are a people serving you in the gospel. And we pray that that good news, that glorious news of Jesus will be proclaimed by us all far and wide, that throughout our homes and our communities, that we will share that word with one another and those who come around us as well, whether it's in our homes, in our workplaces, in our communities at large, even those who pass us by at times, who we maybe only see for a glimpse in a moment. Give us that boldness to speak. As we think of the gospel needs that are around us, Lord, we thank you for all who serve in our midst, and we pray that you will strengthen and encourage men and women, boys and girls who help in so many different ways. We thank you for that willing spirit in our midst, and we pray that that will increase all the more, that we will be united together for your cause here. We pray for your wider churches as well. We thank you for your kingdom as it is being built. We pray for congregations throughout our own presbytery, each one, O Lord, that they may know your blessing and your presence in their midst. We particularly remember other congregations coming into vacancy at this time as well. We remember the congregation in Grava. We ask your blessing on them, that they will again know your leading and guiding in these days ahead. We pray for Reverend David McLeod, who is to be intermoderated over them. May you bless them and uphold him. May you guide them and bless them too. And we remember Iamacritchie and his induction on Friday evening, last Friday evening, to Greyfriars and Inverness. We thank you for that occasion as we enjoyed our time here, that they enjoyed that time as well. And we pray for him as he takes up the ministry there, and that the congregation and preacher would be blessed by you.

May you encourage them and be with them throughout these days ahead as well. We pray for our denomination as a whole, O Lord. We pray for the ministry of your word throughout our land and far and wide, that you would bless it to all ends of the earth, that the promises of your word would be fulfilled to all ends, to the north, the south, the east and west, that you would call a people to yourself. Remember all who minister in so many different ways. We think of Muriel in Cambodia. We again commit her to your care and keeping. Thankful for the opportunities to meet with her over the soon. We pray for that meeting on Tuesday, God willing, that you will bless it, that you will bless her and hear our prayers for her and answer according to your will. Remember all our people, and especially our schools and children at this time, as a time of holiday is upon us. May you watch over people as they travel to and fro, our own as they go away, and visitors who come into our midst. We pray for safety and blessing. We pray for refreshing and encouragement in these weeks of holiday. We thank you for our schools, and we thank you for all the teachers. We pray for each one of them, Lord, to know your spirit upon them, to know your goodness with them. We pray for our schools to be a place of refuge, a place of your spirit abiding and the beauty of the Lord being seen. We know we hear so often different stories, but Lord, we pray that you'd be pleased to visit us in our communities in a special way, to watch over our young people, to draw them to yourself. We ask, O

Lord, that you would bless us now as we continue in our worship, remember us in all our needs, in our homes and families, those who are unwell, those who grieve and mourn, those who are heavy in heart or cast down in spirit at this time, those who feel discouraged or even dismayed. We pray, O Lord, for your spirit to be with them, for your love and your grace to surround them, and your peace to be upon them. And Lord, we ask you'll continue with us now in our time of worship as we open up your word, as we sing your praise. May we do all to your glory and help us to hear you speaking to us as we ask all confessing our sins anew, seeking your goodness and mercy to be upon us as we ask everything in Jesus' precious name and for his glory. Amen.

We'll again sing to God's praise this time in Psalm 89 in the Scottish Psalter, page 344.

[15 : 41] Psalm 89 on page 344. We'll sing from verse 1 to verse 5. The tune is New London. Psalm 89 at verse 1. God's mercies I will ever sing, and with my mouth I shall. Thy faithfulness make to be known to generations all. For mercy shall be built, said I, forever to endure. Thy faithfulness even in the heavens thou wilt establish sure. We'll sing from verse 1 to 5 to God's praise.

God's mercies I will ever sing, and with my mouth I shall. Thy faithfulness came to the Lord, to be warm, to be my God's merciful. The Lord's mercies I will ever sing, and with my mouth I shall. Thy faithfulness came to be born, to be to generations on.

For mercy shall be blessed and I forever to endure.

Thy faithfulness yield in the hands thou wilt be sadly sure.

I with my chosen one have made a covenant gracious thee.

[17 : 40] And to my servant whom I love to thee is for my.

But I thy seed is salvation forever to remain.

And will to generations of life both build and maintain.

The gracious hope I want for the heavens shall express.

And in the congregation all sakes my faithfulness.

[19 : 04] Can we turn together to read God's word now in the book of Genesis? The first book of the Bible, Genesis.

And we'll take up our reading in chapter 11 and at verse 27. Genesis chapter 11, taking up our reading at verse 27, we read down into chapter 12 and verse 9.

Now these are the generations of Terah. Terah fathered Abram, Nahor and Haran. And Haran fathered Lot. Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his kindred in Ur of the Chaldeans.

And Abram and Nahor took wives. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai. And the name of Nahor's wife Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and Iscah.

Now Sarai was barren. She had no child. Terah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife.

[20 : 18] And they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there. The days of Terah were 205 years, and Terah died in Haran.

Now the Lord said to Abram, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make 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. So Abram went as the Lord had told him.

And Lot went with him. Abram was 75 years old when he departed from Haran.

And Abram took Sarai, his wife, and Lot, his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran. And they set out to go to the land of Canaan.

[21 : 26] When they came to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time, the Canaanites were in the land.

Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, To your offspring I will give this land. So he built there an altar to the Lord who had appeared to him.

From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and I on the east. And there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord.

And Abram journeyed on, still going towards the Negev. And so on. May God bless that reading from his word.

Before we turn back to this passage, we're going to sing again to God's praise. This time Psalm 105 in the Scottish Psalter version. Psalm 105, page 375.

[22 : 28] We'll sing from verse 6 to verse 10. And the tune is Glasgow. O ye that are of Abraham's race, his servant well approved, and ye that Jacob's children are, whom he chose for his own, because he and he only is the mighty Lord our God, and his most righteous judgments are in all the earth abroad.

We'll sing from verse 6 down to verse 10 to God's praise. Amen. O ye that are of Abraham's race, his servant well approved, and he that Jacob's children are, and he chose for his own.

Because he and he only is, the mighty Lord our God, and his bosque's wife with his own.

And his bosque's life with her dr hár, and his use of water.

And his bosque'sesis are, God bless you.

[24 : 35] The word he did, O my. Which covenant he firmly laid With faithful Abraham.

And unto Isaac by his soul He did renew the same.

And unto Jacob for a law He made it firm and true A covenant to Israel Which ever should endure We can turn back to our reading in Genesis chapter 12.

And the beginning of that chapter, we'll look at verse 1 to 4 together this evening. Genesis chapter 12. And here we have God's call to Abraham.

We can just read at the beginning there. 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 you a great nation.

[26 : 23] 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. So Abraham went, as the Lord had told him. There's a question we're often asked when we meet somebody, especially for the first time. And that question is, where are you from?

It's one of the most natural questions to ask. But the response you give will depend where you are when you're being asked, or maybe who you are speaking to. If you just meet someone locally around the town, the question might be focused just on Stornoway itself or another village in the island.

It might be, you know, what street are you from? Where's your house? What house do you belong to? Maybe you're speaking to someone who's just from another part of the island. It'd be, what village are you from?

[27 : 26] Or if you're in Scotland, maybe you're away from the island. They'd be asking, where are you from? They might just say the Isle of Lewis or the Western Isles. Or if you're abroad and someone hears your accent and ask, where are you from?

You might just respond, Scotland. There's all kinds of answers that we can give to the question, depending on our circumstances. That question, where are you from?

Tonight we're looking at this passage where God calls Abram. And as we're looking at this passage, we're considering Abram and God's call to him.

And just thinking of Abram, we could ask that question of him. Who is he? And where is he from? You often hear Abraham mentioned.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These names keep appearing throughout the scriptures. Abram is seen as the father of the faith. As we sang in Psalm 105 there in verse 6, it speaks of Abram.

[28 : 33] O ye that are of Abram's race, his servant well approved. He's faithful Abram. He's described as there in that psalm as well. He's such an important figure in the scriptures.

The covenant that was made with him, that God made with him, the promise that God gave to him, as you see in Genesis 12 through to Genesis 17. Abram is a father figure, an important figure in the scriptures, referred to again and again in the Old and into the New Testament.

But who is he? And where is he from? He would be one who would be blessed by God and through whom blessings would come.

But if you were to meet Abram in his time and ask him, where are you from? I wonder what kind of answer he would have given.

Because as you read of him, you often find that he is someone who is constantly on the move. He's a wanderer in so many ways.

[29 : 41] And the question to Abram is not so much, where are you from? But ultimately, where are you going? And that is perhaps the way Abram would answer.

That where he is going. We think of our own culture and how many songs have been written about our homeland, our town, our villages, our islands.

Through generations of people having to leave our island, whether it's for work or moving to another country, so many songs were written looking back to the place they would call home.

The Durukin on Friday night is always full of requests from people who have moved away or who are living away now, requesting songs about where they have come from, remembering home.

A longing for home is something that is instilled in so many people. But what about where we are going? For ourselves and for Abraham, that's a question that we have to ask ourselves as well.

[30 : 54] Not just where are we from, but ultimately, where are we going? And as we read of Abraham here, we see that through faith, he went forward.

He left, as it were, his home place behind because God called him to go to another place. And it's amazing how it is described as you go through the Scriptures that it becomes not just a place looking to this world, but a place beyond.

For he longed for a place that one day he would see in all its fullness and all its glory. A place that many others since then have longed for and to this day long for as well.

And you read of this, especially in the book of Hebrews. And in that amazing chapter, chapter 11 of Hebrews, where it speaks about the people of faith. And just hear what it says about Abraham.

In chapter 11 of Hebrews, verse 8, By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance.

[32 : 09] And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith, he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.

But then it says this, For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

That was not just a city here, but an eternal city. A city whose designer, whose maker and builder is God.

So it wasn't just about where he was from. You see there, he was a wanderer. He lived in tents. But he was looking forward. He was looking forward to a city whose maker and builder is God.

And what about for ourselves? When we consider where we're from, when we think to ourselves, well, where are we going? And what does that mean to us this evening?

[33 : 18] Where are we going? Where are our lives taking us? Not just in the sense of here in this world, but eternally. And how do we find our way?

Well, how would Abraham find this city? How would Abraham find this home for himself and for all of God's people? Well, we see it here.

How he would come to enjoy it. How he would come to find it. It's through God's gracious call. God calling him and the promise of his covenant of grace to him that we see beginning here in chapter 12 of Genesis and it really goes through to chapter 17 of Genesis as well.

But ultimately we see it running through scripture. The seed is here but it bears its fullness in Jesus Christ. And it is through faith in him and listening to his call to us that we experience and know the blessings promised to Abraham here.

And as we read, he would make it a blessing to all the nations, to all the families of the earth shall be blessed through him. It's an amazing promise.

[34 : 42] It's an amazing call. It's an amazing experience that God would call his people to himself. And we just want to look at this call to Abraham and see how the blessing flows to ourselves.

We want to see it in four ways. First of all, just to see Abraham's background and then the call to Abraham and then the blessing to Abraham and then the blessing through Abraham.

I want to go through these four things. And first of all, the background of Abraham. We read at the end there of chapter 11 which kind of sets the scene for us when we read the generations of who his father was and brothers and family.

And we read a number of names there. And there we find the background of Abraham, where he lived and how he moved. But more importantly maybe, the kind of people that they were.

And the immediate context of chapter 11 is the Tower of Babel. If you read in verse 4 of chapter 11, there it says, Then they said, Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens and let us make a name for ourselves.

[36 : 03] This is where the people were at and this is not long after the flood. You see, the people's heart were still inclined to make a name for themselves and not praise the name of God.

But in the midst of this, God came. Came into the midst and scattered them. Scattered them to all ends of the earth. It was not about making their name great.

But that God's name would be made great. And so this was a time when the people had been scattered to all ends of the earth. And Abraham finds himself along with his family in Ur of the Chaldeans.

Now you maybe think of Abraham. You hear this name, Mighty Abraham, Faithful Abraham, Abraham, the servant of God, a godly man, you say to yourself.

And he was. But where was he from? Well, you think he must have had a godly family. He must have come from a godly line.

[37 : 10] And yet what you find as you look into it, as you see his father who was Terah, what you find is that Terah lived among a people who had no word of God.

in chapter 24 of Joshua, just a wee bit further on in the scriptures, it says that Terah, the father of Abraham and Nahor, just as we have here, it says that they lived in this place out of the Chaldeans. But what does it say? It says, they served other gods. They didn't live in a place where God was worshipped. They lived in a place that worshipped other gods.

And Ur of the Chaldeans was a place known for this. It was known for moon worshipping. It was known for idols and a place of many gods. And yet that is where Abraham was from.

That is his background. And he was in the midst of all of that. But doesn't that remind us of how remarkable God's grace is?

[38 : 16] Of how remarkable God is in the abundance of grace he shows to people. That no one is too far from God to be saved.

Here is Abraham caught up in all of this. Gods of all kinds all around. And yet God calls him. It's an amazing thing to think that when we think of our own place today, our own nation today, how God can be calling people, not just who sit under his word, but even people who are out there with no thought of God at this time.

When you think of even ministers and preachers, of the gospel, future ministers may be tonight sitting in a pub watching the football. They may have no thought for God and in our eyes they are far from God and yet God may be calling them.

That is the wonder of God's grace. That is the abundance of God's grace. Here we see it with Abraham. We think Abraham must have been from a godly background, a godly family, and yet they were so far from God and yet God calls them.

And that is the beauty of the scriptures. It's not about our ability to make things great, but it's about God's ability to make a people great, to make a people believe.

[39 : 51] That is the grace that is seen through Abraham. His background is maybe not what we expect.

And when we look at our own background, did we expect God to call us? So often not. But yet God is a God of promise.

He is a God who remembers his people, who calls his people, and who promises to be with them.

And so this Abraham, who lived in our of the Chaldeans, he became the father of the faith.

One who God's covenant came through, God's promise came through. It's a remarkable thing and a remarkable reminder of the God of all grace.

It doesn't matter our background. when God calls, we are to listen. And that's the second thing we want to see here as well, is the call to Abraham.

[41 : 02] So here he was, the background is basically in the midst of idolatry and worshipping false gods. But into this comes the call of Abraham.

And to be part of his covenant of grace, there was to be obedience from Abraham. God's covenant as it was made, God keeps his side at all times.

It's not like a contract that we might make where if one side of the party fails in payments or repayments, the contract is broken. God's covenant is different.

God will always keep his side. but it does call for obedience on Abraham's side here and our side tonight as well.

God calls Abraham and you might expect that call would maybe come once Abraham has sorted his life out, once he has maybe moved away from out of the Chaldeans and moved into a better place, moved away from idols and false gods and false worship.

[42 : 13] But no, it comes right into the midst of where he is. In verse 1 of chapter 12, 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.

His God comes in the midst of all that was happening in his life. And that's so often the case. We think to ourselves we have to sort ourselves out before God will speak to me.

We have to sort our lives out before God can use me or call me to something else. But God says here to Abraham in the midst of everything, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

And later on in scripture in the book of Acts chapter 7, we see a little more of this. It says in verse 2 of Acts 7, The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia before he lived in Haran and said to him, Go out of your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you.

Then he went out from the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran. The God of glory appeared. He appeared to him here in the hour of the Chaldeans, this place of idolatry.

[43 : 40] He appeared to him there. And there's a wonderful reminder to ourselves, even here this evening or wherever we might hear this message, that God speaks to us in our very circumstances here and now.

Whatever our lives are like, whatever is going on around us, whatever is going on in our hearts, God is calling. God is calling us to come and follow him.

He doesn't wait for us to sort our lives out. He doesn't wait for us to make ourselves better, because his grace is realizing we are dead in our trespasses and sins, like we were thinking of this morning in Habakkuk.

Our sins, they are many, but his mercy is more. And he has come to give us life. And so here we see Abraham is called to leave his home, his people, his father's house, and there's a great challenge in this, a challenge to Abraham here.

He is to leave everything behind and trust God, to listen to God and think, well, can this God provide? Can this God keep me? Can this God really fulfill all these promises that he's telling me about through me and my wife Sarah?

[45 : 03] Sarah, who it says is barren, and yet God is saying, I will bless you and make you a great nation. His trust is put to the test straight away.

And that's a challenge to ourselves as well. Do we trust God? Do you trust God this evening with your whole heart, with your whole life, to say, Lord, I cannot do this by myself.

If I cannot go forward in this way, I have my doubts, I have my fears, I have my questions. But when God calls, it's decision time.

It's something we face in this world again and again when God calls us. And we so often weigh things up and we think of, well, what will I lose out and what will I miss, what will I gain?

We weigh things in the balance. And tonight, if you're not heeding this call, what is keeping you back? What is keeping you back from being a part of the same promise to Abraham, the promise that he says, and you all families of the earth will be blessed, the same promise that was given to him, that by faith he would see these promises fulfilled.

[46 : 21] What is keeping you back tonight? Do you not trust God to be able to fulfill all these promises? In the New Testament Jesus met with a man who was called the rich young ruler and Jesus challenged him, you know, go and sell all that you have and then come and follow me.

And he weighed it up and he says I've got too much to lose. He was just looking at it in the temporal things of this world and not the eternal things of this world.

And he decided no, my wealth is too great, the cost is too dear to leave all that behind and follow Jesus. And it's something we have maybe done or maybe something we are doing right now, we are saying no, I have too much to lose in this world.

Well, you have more to lose in eternity. What shall it profit a man to gain the whole world and yet lose his soul?

Abraham is challenged here. The Lord said to Abraham, go from your country, trust me and go forward with me.

[47 : 44] The burden on Abraham was, will you go? And what was his response? Well, you see it in verse 4, so Abraham went as the Lord had told him.

Abraham went. How do we respond to God's call? Will you go? Abraham went.

When you think of the disciples and Jesus called them and said, lay down your nets, leave them behind and come and follow me and I will make you fishers of men. They dropped them there and then.

They left them behind and they followed Jesus. Has anybody ever lost out in doing that? No. And if you have any doubts this evening as to the cost of losing out on anything and following Jesus, you will only lose out if you don't.

the call is to come and follow. The question is, will you go? Will you go with him?

[48 : 56] Well, Abraham went. And what we see then is the blessing to Abraham. Blessing follows obedience. We hear that phrase.

But too, often we think of blessings as everything is going to be well in life. But blessing is knowing that God is with you through all things.

Honor me and I will honor you, God says. And Abraham went in obedience. And as he went in obedience, he found every promise of God to be true.

How God would provide. It wasn't always easy. There were challenges along the way. But God provided for him. In verse two, here it says, I will make you a great nation.

And I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing. This is the very thing that they were looking for in Babel in chapter 11, verse 4.

[50 : 00] They said, come, let us build ourselves a city, a tower with its tops in the heaven, and let us make a name for ourselves. themselves. They wanted to make a name for themselves.

But here in verse 2, we see Abraham here. His name is going to be made great. I will bless you and make your name great.

God will do it. This time, both here in the UK and also in America, politics is all to the fore. all these slogans come out just now of how Britain is going to be great once again, or how America is going to be great.

Put your trust in these people and they will make the nation great again. That is the promises that are being put out there. But all it is, it's like the Tower of Babel back in these days.

They want their name to be great. But the answer to greatness for a nation and for a people, it's not about making our name great, but making God's name great.

[51 : 10] Because only God can make a nation great and a people great. And God will humble the proud and he'll exalt the humble. And so we need to humble ourselves before God.

And in many ways what Abraham is doing here is humbling himself before God. Being obedient to God. Go from your country, your kindred, your father's house to the land that I will show you.

And I will make you a great nation and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing. And so Abraham went. But when you look at Abraham as he goes on, as he's a blessing to many, you still see him traveling around, moving from one place to another, living in tents.

And yet he knew the blessing of God as he worshipped him. He knew the presence of God and God blessed him and a people through him.

He was a man of faith and God rewards that faith as we see in Hebrews 11. And what was his greatest reward?

[52 : 23] His greatest reward was to be looking forward and to see that city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

That is what faith rewards, to bring us into the presence of God. I was going round the castle grounds this week, walking down by the Creed.

And as I was walking down, there was a group of four tourists who had obviously come off one of the cruise ships that were in. And they'd come round the new pathway there across the bridge on the Creed and they were standing at a sign with a map on it.

And as you come over the bridge, there's three ways to go. You can go left, you can go right, and you can go straight ahead. And they're looking at this map and they're seeing me coming towards them and they stop me and they ask me, excuse me sir, could you tell us the way to the city?

I say, well I'm not sure where you think you're going, but Stornow is not much of a city compared to some of the cities that you've seen. But I said, I can point them in different directions here.

[53 : 33] They're looking at the map and probably thinking, the shortest way is straight ahead, but it's just going into the woods. And I'm thinking, if they go in there and they find more ways to go, they're just going to end up lost.

So I said, well your best way is to follow the river down to the mouth and then follow around the path along by the sea. At least you'll have something to keep you right. But as I left them behind, I thought to myself, what a question that is.

Can you tell me the way to the city? And that's the question that's behind Abraham here as well.

And the question that's behind our own thinking tonight, what is the way to the city?

And what is the city that we are looking for? We think of where we're from, but what about where we're going? they may have been disappointed, I hope not, when they came into the town of Stornoway.

But there's one thing for sure, that if we find this city whose maker and builder is God, there will be no disappointment. There will be no regret of leaving anything behind, because we will truly see that faith in God and in Christ has a great reward.

[54 : 58] No matter our journey through this life, no matter the ups and downs along the way, we are to look to a city whose maker and builder is God.

That is the blessing that Abraham knew. And just as we conclude, just briefly, I want to think of the blessing through Abraham. I will bless those who bless you, and in you all families of the earth shall be blessed.

There is an ongoing promise here, that through his covenant with Abraham, God would bless all families of the earth, all who put their trust in him.

Go back to the question, where are you from, and who do you belong to? I mentioned how often we hear songs sung in our own culture.

And one of the songs that will always catch my attention is the song about Shobost. Shashiabost is Boehelam. And there's one line, or some lines in that song that speak about a generation of people who are no longer living.

[56 : 28] But yet you still see their mark left behind. The gardens and the fields, they speak of a people no more.

The marks that are there. And we think of them as we see it around our island in so many different places. You think of the lazy beds. You see them everywhere throughout our island and you think, how on earth did something grow there?

And yet they are a mark to us of the life that once was. Or the peat banks that so many now are not used. They're a reminder to us of what people relied on in the past.

But they're a reminder to us of the potential that is still there. Places that are now overgrown. And yet when we think of that in light of God's covenant with Abraham, it can be something we think is forgotten.

Something that in many ways that we have left to the side and has become overgrown. And yet the marks are still there for us. The wonder of God's grace is still there for us.

[57 : 44] And at the heart of this is the fulfillment of this covenant in Christ. And where we see the marks on Christ.

The marks, the wounds that bore our sin on the cross. And the promise that Abraham had of a rich land, a blossoming land, that is the promise that is ours in Christ.

Of a greater place, a better place, a place that Jesus said in John 14, I go to prepare a place for you.

And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, that where I am, you may be also. a city, a place whose maker and builder is God.

So the question for us tonight is not just where are you from, the question is where are you going?

[58 : 55] And do you long for that place? Are the things of this world taking hold of your heart so that your heart is overgrown with all the pressures of this world?

Or are you hearing the call of God as it was to Abraham? In the midst of idolatry and everything else that was going on around him, God called him out of that place and gave him the promise of a blessing to him and being a blessing to others and a faith that had its reward.

Abraham, was a man, just a person like you and I, and yet God called him in the same way as God calls us, each one of us.

Abraham may be seen as the father of the faith, but through him and ultimately through his seed, through Christ Jesus, there is a blessing to all the families of the earth.

If we have faith that we too will see this city whose maker, whose designer and builder is God. Tell me the way to the city.

[60 : 13] The way to the city is by faith in Christ. So let's hear his call and let's follow him. Let us pray.

Our father in heaven, we do thank you for your word and for the promises we find in them. We think of the fear that these names can so often put in us.

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and how unworthy we are. And yet when we see their background, when we see where they're from and ultimately where they're going, we thank you that it reminds us that your call is the same to us.

To heed the call of God and to follow you that we might by faith see that great city whose maker and builder is God. So Lord, guide us along the way, keep us and protect us and give us ears to hear and to respond to your call as we ask it all in Jesus' name.

Amen. We're going to conclude by singing to God's praise in Psalm 16 in the same psalms, the same psalm as we had at the start, page 17 of the psalm books.

[61 : 29] Psalm 16 at verse 8, we'll sing down to the end of the psalm, the tune is Golden Hill. It's a psalm that reminds us of our ultimate, our blessing in God as we set the Lord always before us.

Because he is at my right hand, I'll not be overthrown. Therefore, my heart is glad, my tongue with joy will sing, my body too will rest secure in hope unwavering.

We'll sing from verse 8 to 11 to God's praise. Amen. God's love and my right hand, I'll not be overthrown.

Therefore, my heart is glad, my tongue with joy will sing, my body too will rest secure in hope unwavering.

For you will not die my soul in death to stay nor will you leave your holy one to see the wounds decay.

[63 : 45] you are lost ... to me Which shall I go at your right hand?

Joy come, your face will shine. After the benediction, I'll go to the door to my right.

We'll close the benediction. Now may grace, mercy and peace from God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit rest upon and abide with you all now and forevermore. Amen.