

The Call of Abram

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[0 : 00] Let's turn back to Genesis chapter 12. I'm reading at the beginning. The Lord said to Abram, Go from your own 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 whom 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.

I would like if the Lord spares us to have a wee look at the life of this man, Abraham, for a few weeks. Not an exhaustive study, but just, as it were, skimming through it, because he is a remarkable man.

He is termed the father of the faithful, and for very good reason. Many of the Bible stories, and we often call them Bible stories, we get children's Bible storybooks.

Many of the stories in the Bible, the historical stories, are absolutely amazing. And I think sometimes we lose a sense of just the wonder, just how remarkable some of these historical stories are.

[1 : 28] But God has recorded every single one of them for our benefit. There's nothing in the Bible that is there by chance. It is there for us.

God has chosen what is revealed to us and what isn't. And as we look at the life of Abram, I want to do it in a way that we will learn and hope, take lessons ourselves from what has been shown us.

And as we know, one of the wonderful things about the characters of the Bible is that they are shown to us, not in their perfection, but often in their weakness. Because all the Bible characters, there's probably only one or two characters that you can't really find.

You say to yourself, but they were sinners, obviously 100% sinners. When you look at that person like Daniel, beloved of the Lord, everything that is recorded of his life is really quite extraordinary, because you cannot really find fault.

But even the enemies of Daniel, who were jealous of him and were trying to bring him down, they were examining his life in detail and they couldn't find anything to get him on.

[2 : 42] The only thing they could get Daniel on was his love of the Lord. And that's, of course, where they did get him. But Daniel tells us very simply, because the prayer of Daniel in Daniel chapter 9 is a great prayer of confession of sin.

And Daniel, like all good men, was so aware of his sin. But when we look at most of the other characters in the Bible, it shows us, yes, they're great exploits.

They were ordinary people who were made, at periods in their lives, to do extraordinary things by an extraordinary God.

That's very, that's simply what it is. By displaying great faith. It wasn't that they themselves were extraordinary people, but that the Lord, the amazing God of heaven and earth, empowered them and enabled them, and it was done through faith to do many great things.

But, of course, sometimes other aspects of their life, it was also shown where, despite that great faith will come, not today, but another time, to see that, although Abraham's faith was stunning, it was incredible in many ways.

[4 : 01] Maybe I shouldn't use the word incredible, but it was an awesome faith, yet it was in his very faith that he wavered at times. But the one thing the Bible always highlights through it all is the faithfulness of God in everything.

Now, we find the Lord coming to Abraham, coming into his life with a very clear command. And it was God who took the initiative here, because Abraham wasn't looking for God.

It tells us very clearly, back in Joshua, that Abraham was of a family of idolaters. So, at the time that God revealed himself to Abraham, and we don't know that meeting, we're told in Acts chapter 7 that the God of glory revealed himself to Abraham.

And if you were to ask Abraham all down the line, all the years, Abraham, do you remember when the God of glory revealed himself? You would say, oh, 100%. Just like Saul of Tarsus.

Saul of Tarsus never, ever, ever, ever forgot the moment that that great, glorious appearing of the Lord Jesus, where he shone down upon him on the road to Damascus.

[5 : 14] And Saul became a different man from that experience. And it was the same with Abraham. We don't know, we're not given the detail that we're given of Saul's conversion.

But it is something that had a life-changing impact upon Abraham. And you know, this is what happens with ourselves too, that God takes the initiative.

We often don't realize that. And maybe if you're sitting here today as a Christian, you're able now to look back with hindsight and look back with knowledge.

And you know that it was God who took the initiative. But when you begin becoming, when life begins to change for you and you become unsettled with things and you maybe begin to start wanting the Lord or seeking the Lord, the last thing in your mind at that particular time is that God is taking an initiative in your life.

You don't realize that. But it's God who is at work. We're not aware of it. And in fact, we might actually be seeking the Lord and oh, just praying that the Lord would come into our lives and we think the Lord is so far away and it's actually, it's a Lord who is actually working.

[6 : 33] Because He takes the initiative. we love Him, the Bible says, because He first loved us. And let me say this, if your heart today is warming to the Lord, that's not a warmth that's just sort of in yourself.

That's God. That's God working within you. And so it's very, very important that we learn to submit to these things rather than resist.

if you're being drawn to the Lord, that last thing you must do is resist that. That's the worst thing you can do. And I'm sure some of us look back over our lives and remember before becoming Christians, really being drawn and saying, you know, I would like to be a Christian and then fighting against it and it has caused, I'll tell you, it's caused a lot of pain.

And there's a lot of things happened in between that you just say, oh, why on earth did I do that? And there's always a fear, what if God eventually says, well, I'm not going to, my spirit will not always thrive with man.

What if God says, that's it, I'm just going to leave that person. So if you're warming to the gospel, if you're feeling yourself being drawn to the gospel, remember that this is God's initiative with you.

[7 : 54] He is the one who begins, just as he did with Abraham. And so we find that Abraham, he had lived in Ur of the Chaldees, which is in today's Iraq, and then that he moved from Ur to a place Hara, which would probably be in today's Turkey.

So these are areas that are well known to us. And the Lord said to Abraham, look, I want you to go and I'm going to go, I'm going to send you, I'm asking you to go to a place that I'll show you.

But the thing is, this Abraham, before I show you, you've got to get up and go. And that is incredible faith, because here's this man, Abraham, who, as we say, had been from a family of idolaters, and God reveals himself to him, and he tells him to get up and to go.

And he said, I'll show you. Didn't tell him where he was to go, but he said, I'll show you. And that's what we call faith, is taking God at his word.

when the rest of it doesn't really make sense. And I'm sure all of us at one time or another have been there, where faith has been tested, because we're believing God, but what we believed would be has not yet come, or has not happened.

[9 : 16] And we sometimes feel that we're in a kind of a limbo, and we're saying, well, this seems to be what God is saying, but, but, and sometimes that's where faith takes us.

And so we find that Abraham actually got up and he went. And so it was an amazing thing how he leaves his homeland, leaves his people. In Joshua 24, it tells us, long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Tira, the father of Abraham and Nahor, and they served other gods.

So it's from that background, that God intervened in Abraham's life. And the other thing I want to say about it is this. If you had seen Abraham before God had come to him, and there he was, he'd be worshipping the moon god, and I can't remember what all gods, I think the moon god was certainly one of the gods he really worshipped.

And you would say to yourself, this man Abraham, he's going to become an amazing follower of the lord, but look at all the rituals he's going through, he doesn't know anything about the living and through God, not interested in God, doesn't know him.

And yet when God takes the initiative, and God comes, and God reveals himself to Abraham, it all changes. And the point we're making is this, don't ever write anybody off.

[10 : 45] You may think that there are people today in your life, or people you know, and they are so hard of the gospel, they seem to be untouched, almost untouchable.

And you say you maybe prayed about them and prayed for them, and you say, ah, it looks like there are lost cause. Well, you know, one of the things, the Bible is full of lost causes that became saints.

And the history of the Christian church is full of people who appeared lost causes, and came to embrace the Lord Jesus Christ. So let us never despair, let us never say, oh, well, there's no point speaking to him, or speaking to her, or praying about him, or praying about her.

We don't know. God is a God who is full of surprises, and he surprises us so often by doing just this very thing. Anyway, what we've got to remember, with regard to the saving of a soul, and this is something that we're probably quite bad at doing.

See, we're very, we're kind of judgmental in our nature, and we have people bracketed and categorized and such like, and sometimes when a person is saved, we say, oh, it was easy for that person to be saved.

[12 : 00] See the Christian background they had. See the home they came from. Let's remember this. It took exactly the same sacrifice of Christ, the same shedding of his blood, to save a little baby as to save the thief on the cross.

No difference. And we've always got to remember that. There is only one way to be saved. There is only one saviour. And it's the one sacrifice.

So we've always got to remember that. Anyway, the Lord called Abraham to go out and to leave where he was.

I often try and think of that moment because you put yourself in that situation. Here's the Lord. He appears to Abraham and he says to Abraham, I want you to leave. I want you to leave everything here and I want you to go out to a place that I will show you.

And here's Abraham and he's packing up his tents and all his livestock and everything and the neighbours are saying, you're moving Abraham. Yes, moving. where?

[13 : 13] Well, I don't really know but I'm moving. You don't know, Abraham? No, but I believe I will know. When?

I don't know. And people would, if you met that kind of situation, you saw somebody flitting, you saw the removal van at the house and they're putting all the furniture into the house and you said, you're moving, yeah, where are you going?

Don't know. you'd say to you're sure, that's bonkers. And at a human level, that's exactly how it was with Abraham. And that's what makes his faith so great.

That he has this massive household, because the Lord had made Abraham very rich and he had a lot of cattle, a lot of servants, men servants, maids servants, a huge household.

And he had to gather all that and he was responsible for all of them and he's moving out and he doesn't know where he's going. But God says, I'll show you. And so, as we said, this is really remarkable faith.

[14 : 17] But you know, this is the way that the Lord still operates. And that's what makes faith the exciting journey it is and sometimes the difficult journey it is. Because you know in life, and particularly the day we're living in, we want everything mapped and coded and sorted out, A, B, C, D, our diaries.

Well, this is what we're going to do here, and then we're going to do that, and then that, and then we want to know sort of like the end from the beginning. We want it all settled out. The Lord says, sorry, you can tear that up if you're going by faith.

That's not the way I work. Faith works in a different way. It's very often just a step by step. There are certain things, for instance, once a person becomes a Christian, we know where we're going, we know the end.

But the journey, we have no idea what all it's going to involve and entail. And maybe there are some of you here today and you're in exactly this situation that you just wish, oh, I wish the Lord would show me what's next or where I'm going, what's the next step or what's going to happen because there's all this uncertainty in my life and the Lord is saying to us, you've got to learn to wait, you've got to learn to be patient and above all you've got to learn to trust me.

I know. And as he says in Jeremiah, the thoughts I have to you are thoughts of good and not of evil to give you an expected end or the plans I have for you are good.

[15 : 49] The Lord has a purpose, he has a plan. Sometimes the going from A to B can take you all over the place like it did David. God told David you're going to be king. But the moment from his anointing to his arrival on the throne took him to almost A to Z everywhere, all over the place, into the land of the Philistines, hiding in rocks and caves.

Seven years of being all over the place, dicing with death. And all the time God was at work in David's life, chipping, moulding, teaching David patience, learning to trust in him, so that at the end of the day God says over David, he's a man after my own heart.

David wasn't a man after God's own heart just overnight. He took a lot of work, and so in your life and in my life. So this whole idea that faith, we need to know everything mapped out, that's not the way it works.

God called Abraham, one of the things he did, he took Abraham out of his comfort zone. That's tough as well, because we like to have everything around us where we feel familiar with it, we feel comfortable with it, we want everything so that we know how everything is happening.

But we hate it when everything like that is shaking around and all of a sudden we're not sure, and the props that we used to lean on and the supports that were there, they're taken away.

[17 : 28] And there's almost like an element of chaos. But the Lord says, you know, when you follow me, you have to take up your cross, deny yourself and follow me.

And we often don't know where the Lord is going to take us. And that's difficult because we want, don't want to labour this point, but it's just so true, we want to be in control of our lives.

It's only natural. I don't know anybody that says, it doesn't bother me if I'm not in control. We don't need to be in like a major control, but we want to sort of have a lid upon our life so that things are going in the way that we want them to go.

And it's very difficult when our life day by day, it's like out of control. It's like you had a horse out of control and you can't, you can't, you're trying to get that way and the horse is going this way and this way and then backwards and rising up and you're saying, I'm out of control.

And sometimes that's how we feel our lives are. The journey of faith can be tough. And that's why you have psalmists like Asaph.

[18 : 37] He was following the Lord and he was zealous for the Lord and he was looking at the godless. And their lives were a breeze. Everything was going swimmingly well.

His was at a personal level, everything was going wrong and he became envious of the ungodly. And sometimes we can almost feel like that.

But the Lord won't leave it like that. And so we find that the Lord has made a covenant with Abraham. Now, the Lord, there was a lot of covenant making in the Old Testament. For instance, the first covenant that we have, we termed, or theologian termed, the covenant of works which God made with Adam in the Garden of Eden.

It was, Adam, if you do what you're told, it was an if and then. It was this, that's a lot of the covenants where if you do this, then this is what will happen. And God made this covenant with Adam and he said, if you obey me, then you will, everything will be good.

It will remain as it is. But, there was this threat. There is one tree, tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Eat of that and you will die.

[19 : 48] And we, of course, we know what happened. So, theologians term that as the covenant of works. But, there were various other covenants. For instance, God made a covenant with Noah after the flood.

He says, I am confirming my covenant with you. Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the floods. And, never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.

That doesn't mean that there won't be a flood here or a flood there. But, this, like a universal flood. This is my sign of the covenant I make. I have set my bow in the cloud and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

That's the rainbow. So, there were a lot of covenants. Now, some of the covenants were conditional like what we have in the Garden of Eden. What we have when Israel entered the land of promise.

God is saying to them, if you follow me, I will bless you. If you begin to follow other gods, my curse will come upon you.

[20 : 53] So, that's what we call a conditional promise. There's the condition. If you do this, God says, then I will do that. But, many of God's promises are what we term unconditional.

That he just promises. promises. And that's what he did with Abraham. He gave this, as it were, an unconditional promise. There was, first of all, there was one condition, and that was that Abraham had to get out of his own country, his own kindred, his own land, and to go to a place the Lord would show.

That was what he had to do. But the Lord then promised great blessings. I will, I will, I will make of you a great nation.

Now for Abraham, remember he's 75 when he left, he and Sarah, they've been married a long time and they have no children. God is saying, I'm going to make of you a great nation.

That must have thrilled the heart of Abraham, but again we know this is one of the promises that God gave him that was severely tested in the life of Abraham. And the thing is that that can be, it was fulfilled at two levels.

[22 : 10] We know for instance that Abraham became the father of the Jewish race and even to this very day they will trace their ancestry back to Abraham that they are children of Abraham.

But also at a spiritual level, we are children of Abraham because he's termed the father of the faithful. So he is one of these landmark characters in the whole history of the world and the history of the church.

And God said to Abraham that he would make his name great. And again this is, I suppose it's really quite wonderful because Abraham was living in a very dangerous world at that time, a very cruel world.

And it's very interesting that in the previous chapter the people of the earth when they were going to build this huge tower, it tells us in verse 4, 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.

Here are these people and they're saying, let's make a name for ourselves. Don't know their names. God turned everything into confusion. But here's Abraham. God says to Abraham, I will make your name great.

[23 : 34] And he sure did. It tells us there that regarding the land, the people said of Abraham that he was a prince and a great man amongst them.

That's what the people of the land said. And God made Abraham great. He made his name great and he gave him, we're told, he gave him great wealth. Great honor.

Now God doesn't give all his people great wealth. I know that there's a, sometimes it's taught a prosperity religion and you cannot find that in the word of God.

God will sometimes make his people wealthy. But if you went around the world today, I would say probably the majority of believers, the vast majority of believers, when you go to where the bulk are and their Chinas and many of the other countries where great work is going on, some of them have very, very, very, very little.

But the Bible tells us that the poverty that a Christian will experience in this world will be completely changed in the world to come. That it is there that the full riches will be known.

[24 : 43] And the riches that the Christian really enjoys are above all the riches of God's grace. God also promised Abraham that he was going to bring blessing to the whole world.

That through him blessing to the whole world was to come. And these promises to Abraham, I could imagine Abraham sitting in his tent at night and thinking, well, what God has said to me is really amazing.

That he's going to make me the father of a nation. that he's going to make me great, my name great. That he's going to, that through me, all the nations of this world are going to be blessed.

And I'm sure, I'm sure, Abraham must have, it was, if that happened to me and I'm sure it happened to you, you'd be saying, this is too much for me. And we know the fulfillment of that prophecy was fulfilled in and through the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because with regard to the human birth of Jesus, Jesus came directly in the human line through the Abrahamic line. So that he could trace his ancestry all the way back to Abraham.

[26 : 04] And from, of course, Jesus came this global spread of the whole gospel. And it's very interesting, it says, I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you, I will curse.

And a lot of people have followed that through and seen that as a way of, that with regard to, both with regard to Israel and with regard to the Christian faith, that although people may oppress and hurt and harm for a time, they will ultimately be destroyed and that God's people will always, always, at the end come out victorious.

Although they might be oppressed, they might be downtrodden, they might even be slaughtered, and that may seem a strange way of looking at it, but the end result of it all will always be that God will bring a curse on those who oppress his people.

people. And the question I think we have to ask ourselves today as we conclude, where do we stand with regard to all that we have here today?

Only in glory will we have an idea of just how widely this promise was fulfilled, because glory will be filled with a number that no man can number, and they will all be part of this great promise, more than the sand of the seashore, more than the stars in the sky, all in glory.

[27 : 41] And that was the promise God gave to Abraham. Now, God spoke to Abraham, and this we conclude, and he said to Abraham, right Abraham, I want you to go.

You've got to go. It's time to move. I am calling the shots in your life. Right, where are you today with regard to that?

Right, take this right home to yourself personally. Where are you today? The Lord is saying to you, if you're not a believer today, the Lord is saying to you, look, it's time to move.

You've heard this gospel, you know this gospel. You're pushing it aside, pushing it behind, or saying after another time. No, the Lord is saying it's now.

And you know, the blessings come when we obey. Not when we say to the Lord, oh, well, I'll tell you, at a more convenient season. That's like what Agrippa said, oh, at a more convenient season, Paul, I'll call for you.

[28 : 43] We never read that there was a more convenient season. this is the time. Now is the day of salvation. And if you are a believer, maybe the Lord is saying to you about something.

And he's saying, look, are you serving me in your life? Are you doing what I'm asking you to do? And the thing is, if we do, we will experience his blessing.

As we said, the journey of faith can be difficult. Maybe some of you, as we said, some of you here today might be going, being strung out as Christians. And you're wondering, what is God doing in my life?

If you had asked Abraham, with this we finish, you know this, Abraham was given this great promise. And he went to the land of promise. But you know, in his lifetime, he never really was able to settle down.

He remained a wanderer in it. But his people, it became their possession. If you had said to Abraham, and said to Abraham, you know, Abraham, do you think it was a mistake following God?

[29 : 52] He would have said, never. Abraham, do you ever regret sort of getting up and leaving everything behind and going out, not knowing where you were going? Abraham said, never, not for one moment.

Following the Lord was greater and better than anything that this world could ever have given me. That would be Abraham's testimony.

Let us all make sure that this is what we're doing, that we go with the Lord, that we follow him all the time. Let us pray. Lord, our God, we ask you to bless us this day. We give thanks for the great history that is in the word of God, telling us great things about your people and lessons that we ought to be able to learn.

And we pray that our souls will heed and will hear what you're saying to us. We pray to bless every home and every family here today, all whom we love.

And we ask for protection and your safekeeping at all times. Deliver us, keep all that we are and all that we have under your gracious care and keeping.

[31 : 02] Take us to our home safely, we pray. Bless a cup of tea in the hall after and watch over us doing us good and take away sin in Jesus' name. Amen. From the Scottish Psalter, Psalm 45, the first version of the Psalm, verse 10 to verse 13.

Psalm 45, the Scottish Psalter. It's on page 267. O daughter, hearken and regard and do thine ear incline.

Likewise, forget thy father's house and people that are thine. Then of the king desired shall be thy beauty vehemently. Because he is thy Lord, do thou whom worship reverently.

The daughter there of Tyre shall be with gifts and offerings greed. Those are the people that are rich, thy favour shall entreat. Behold, the daughter of the king, all glorious is within, and with embroideries of gold her garments brought have been.

Verses 10 to 13 of Psalm 45, the first version of the tune is Arnold. O daughter, hearken. O daughter, that I am in undree guard unto thy near mind.

[32 : 35] Thy words forget thy father's heart. And people that are might.

Then of the king desire shall be thy beauty vehemently.

Because he is thy lord do lie in worship reverently.

The daughter there of time shall be with gifts and offerings trade.

those of the people that are rich like paper shall end tree.

[33 : 57] Behold the daughter of the king of glory that is within and with them write the ease of gold her garments wrought thou being.

Now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore. Amen.