

The Call, Life and Faith of Abraham

Part 1 - Genesis 12

Since we have ended our study of Ephesians, in the next couple of weeks I am going to look a few things God has laid upon my heart. In the second week of September I will be going up to Red Feather Lakes to preach and to study and pray, listening for what God has for us next. I ask that you be in prayer for me as I listen for the voice of the Lord.

Have you ever vacillated in your faith? Have you ever had times when your faith was great, God was a present and strong force in your life and it seemed like you could do no wrong. Everything you touched was blessed and your life was filled with joy.

Have you had that experience? On the flip side, have you had times when your faith in God was weak, in fact almost non-existent. God is quiet and life is a struggle. Maybe you read your Bible but there really wasn't anything exciting happening with it. Not only do you not see God working in your life, you keep messing up. You make mistakes. You make choices without God's counsel and things get a little messy in your life.

Well, if this is the case then you are in good company. This morning I wanted us to look at the life and call of Abraham and see if there might be some lessons we can learn from his life. As I have read and studied the life of Abraham, whose name was Abram until God changed it later to Abraham, which I will use from here on out.

As I read and studied the life of Abraham I am amazed at a couple of things.

First, the great movement of God among the people of the earth. God has constantly been reaching out to save and bless humanity. After the stumble in the garden of Eden, after the flood which wiped all humanity but eight people, after generations of people lived and died after Noah, God looks down upon the earth and in His compassion and love, reaches out to one man, Abraham, and says, through you I will make salvation available to the people of earth.

Secondly, I am also amazed at the messiness of Abraham. Sometimes I think we look at these men and women of the Bible and we think, wow, they are super saints. I wish I had their kind of faith.

I was reading through Hebrews and in chapter 11 it speaks of the faith of Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Gideon, Samson, David and others. While we can read about and admire their faith, the reality of their lives is they were also just people who messed up a lot. They exhibited great faith but they also exhibited great failure as well.

As I think about their faith and their failures I know there is hope for you and me. Let's look at some of the things that occurred in Abraham's life.

First of all, Abraham was nobody special. Abraham was not like Noah. Look at what was said about Noah.

Genesis 6:8-9, "But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord...Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God."

I get why God called Noah to save the world. He walked with God, he was righteous, blameless and found favor with God. Who wouldn't pick this man to be a leader and the man God used to save the world.

But that is not the story of Abraham. Look with me at the passage where God called Abraham.

Let's begin by reading **Genesis 12:1-3**, "Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you. And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great. And so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.'"

The story of Abraham's call actually begins back in Genesis 11 where you can read about his father and his people going all the way back several generations to Shem, the son of Noah.

The call we read in Genesis 12 is the first interaction Abraham had with God that is recorded.

One of the important lessons we can learn from Abraham is

1. It is **always** God that initiates a relationship

Sometimes we think it is us who initiates the walk with God. You are seeking Him, you are searching for Him but in reality it has been God all along that has been wooing you into a relationship with Him.

You may have thought it was your choice to come here this morning and in some ways that is true. But isn't it also true that something inside of you was stirring, prompting, speaking to you about coming to church. That was God. That was God's Holy Spirit in you and around you, calling you into this place where you can put aside all the noise of the world and your busy life and hear from, be ministered to and worship God.

I want to tell you this morning if you heard an inward voice telling you to get up and come to church, it was God speaking directly to you. Your faith has been activated and you were obedient.

This is the call Abraham received. Come out of your house. Go where I want you to go for I have a plan for your life. But unlike Noah, Abraham wasn't walking with God when God called him. In fact, it is very possible that Abraham was an idol worshipper.

As you read the history of Abraham in chapter 11 of Genesis, you see that he was probably born in Ur of the Chaldeans and the city of Ur has been documented historically as a pagan city, steeped in idolatry.

We read in **Joshua 24:2**, “...From ancient times your fathers lived beyond the River, namely, Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods.”

This man Abraham, who God called to be the father of the nation of Israel, was raised in a pagan, idol worshipping culture. He was nobody special but God picked him out and said it is going to be you that I am going to use.

Sometimes I think people believe that the people God uses are people whose faith is established and strong. Obviously this was not the case with Abraham. There is no evidence that he previously had a relationship with God or even had heard from God.

Knowing this always gave me hope. I didn't have to become someone great and mighty before God began to use me. In fact,

2. It is usually the **nobodys** that God likes to use

Look with me at **1 Corinthians 1:26-29**, ²⁶ **Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.** ²⁷ **But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.**

²⁸ God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no one may boast before him.”

This says to me that God can use you where you are. It doesn't matter what is going on if He is calling you to be a worker in His kingdom, and trust me, He is. You don't have to be a super saint, you don't have to have all kinds of biblical knowledge or experience. All you have to have is a willing heart.

Abraham was a idol worshipper. Moses was a murderer as was David. Peter, well, the apostle Peter was always getting into trouble and when the rubber met the road, he even denied he knew Jesus. On and on it goes. God sometimes calls those who have a special education or special giftings, or are extremely devout like Noah but most times it is the people who have nothing to offer to God but their brokenness and their heart.

PAUSE

Now, when I began studying Abraham's life I was probably like most of you. I thought when he received the call from he was extremely obedient and left his family and the land where he was raised. But a closer study of Abraham's life shows he was not immediately obedient. Let's read some scripture.

Acts 7:2-3, “...The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, and said to him, ‘Leave your country and your relatives, and come into the land that I will show you.’”

According to this passage God called Abraham to leave his relatives and to follow Him. This is not what we read that happened in Genesis 11.

Genesis 11:31, “Terah (the father of Abraham) took *Abraham* his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son *Abraham*’s wife; and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan; and they went as far as Haran and settled there.”

According to this passage, Abraham left his home in Ur but he wasn’t following God, he was following his father Terah.

Instead following the call from God he received in Mesopotamia by separating himself from his father and his family, he moved with them to Haran. He delayed his obedience to the Lord.

Some scholars say that it might have been five years or more before Abraham finally departed from Haran.

This is something we can see that happens at times in the Bible. People hear from God but they delay following the call of God on their life.

Take Jonah for example. We have heard the story of Jonah since we were kids. Jonah gets a call from the Lord. He tells Jonah to go to this wicked city called Nineveh, preach to them that I am God and I see their great wickedness and I am coming to bring judgment to this city. Repent and I may have mercy on you.

Jonah hears what God wants him to do and scripture says he doesn’t go share the word of the Lord with the people of Nineveh but he flees in the opposite direction. Instead of being obedient, he delays following the call of God on his life.

Well, you know the rest of the story. After being thrown out of a boat a whale swallows him, Jonah repents and cries out the Lord and the whale spits him up on the beach. After cleaning himself up he heads off the Nineveh, shares the word of the Lord and the whole city repents.

I had a similar yet different experience myself. After receiving the call of the Lord into ministry at the age of 29 I ran the other way. I ran because I was making too much money. I was having too much fun. I did not want to surrender and be the guy God wanted to use.

My journey running away from God went for eight more years before I became exhausted, tired of living in the belly of the whale.

But you know what? God never let me go. Even through my rebellion He protected me and He protected His plan for me. He knew His plan for me and through me was going to happen it was just a matter of when.

God said the following through Isaiah.

Isaiah 55:11, "...My Word that goes out from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

God's call upon Abraham might have been delayed, God's call upon the life of Jonah might have been delayed, God's call upon my life might have been delayed but it was fulfilled.

3. God's word, His spoken word over your life will produce what He desires. The question is, are you delaying it?

In Abraham's life, it was his connection to his family that delayed him from fully following God. It wasn't until after his father Terah died that Abraham moved from Haran into the land God directed him to. It was a death that finally broke the hold the world had on Abraham.

In Jonah's life I think it might have been fear of the unknown or just plain stubbornness that kept him from following the call God had on his life.

For me, it was money, lifestyle and all the things I thought I would have to give up. But you know what? Once I finally surrender my life completely to the Lord what I gained was more than any amount of money could buy. Love, the ability to receive and give love. Fulfillment. I have a purpose in life that is everlasting. I get to be in a peaceful relationship with my God and I get to help others find their way.

What about you? What is the connection to this world that is holding you back, keeping you from fulfilling God's call on your life.

Here is one of my life verses. It is a verse that I memorized years ago but am still working on living out.

Galatians 2:20, "For I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives within me. And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."

In closing let me say,

Abraham was a nobody but God had a plan for His life. This morning I want to tell you, because you are here it says to me, like Abraham, that you have heard from God. He has placed a call on your life. You don't have to be a super saint. There are things He wants to accomplish through you right where you are all you have to do is have a willing heart.

Let's pray

Your culture should not dictate your Christianity. In fact, your culture, as a Christian, should be determined by your Christianity. And we know there is only one kind of Christianity – Biblical Christianity. Charles W Stebbing