

Abram's Call Genesis 12-15:6

This morning I want to begin with some news. It is neither bad news nor good news; it is just news, news that I need you to know about and news that I need you to pray about.

It is news that casts a long shadow over our passage today if we believe and trust God for His provision.

If we have lived any amount of years on this earth, besides death and taxes, one thing is for sure – life changes and life challenges are imminent. Would you agree? At some point I woke up and realized I was 55 not 35 and I wondered when that happened. There are more aches and pains, retirement is getting closer, I have lost a parent and the concern for the other is greater.

Is there anyone this morning who would say to me that over the course of your life not one change has taken place that has affected you? You all know what I'm talking about. Life changes mean that we must make changes ourselves to what we do or how we do them, even perhaps why we do them. Such events reshape us and cause us to realign priorities in order to focus on new challenges all the while asking the sovereign creator and sustainer of the world what He is doing. It's not meant to be an insult or to challenge His infinite wisdom. We just want to know why He's placed those circumstances in our path at this juncture in our lives. Would you agree? Our response is to both accept and abide in God's plan knowing that they are meant for our good even though at the time we may not understand what that plan is OR we can abandon any belief that God, if He exists, knows what He is doing, cares about us or has the ability to change the circumstances. At other times we try to run ahead of God thinking we know the plan and the way only to find out that our ways weren't His ways and our thoughts weren't His thoughts. In some way, when

we are willing, He brings us back into His plan. That was Abram's experience.

If we are willing to look, we find that God's grace is sufficient for us because we know that when we are weak then we are made strong, but it isn't our own strength, it is strength from the Lord.

So here's the news. Several weeks ago, I met with Kim regarding the youth and Wednesday night programs. She shared with me a number of life changes that are taking place within her family. With those life changes came the decision that it was necessary for her to step down from her responsibilities of leading the Rock Solid youth ministry and the Wednesday night youth program.

As you can imagine, that left some gaps in those ministries. With that news, our discipleship team had some focused discussion around those ministries. Some very good questions were asked forcing us to consider why we do what we do. We discussed several options. Initially it was my desire to continue the Wednesday night program, especially when a couple weeks ago a Mom came by just before prayer meeting asking about our program for children.

We also considered several options for the teens for Wednesday.

Here's what you need to know and how you can pray. For the time being our Wednesday night ministry for grade school and teens has been suspended. Now, maybe you sit there and say we need to have a program for kids, kids are our future and I would agree with that.

With regard to the teens, I am assuming responsibility for Rock Solid and am asking parents to assist with things like transportation, event ideas, and chaperoning events. We will continue to meet monthly on the first Sunday for SNAC and hopefully try to plan another activity during the

month. SNAC will be moved up to 6:00p.m. on the Sunday's that we meet.

It may be that God will tap you on the shoulder telling you to get involved in some way.

In our current series we are considering God's provisions. I guess the question to ask in all this is do we trust God - in all things?

If we trust God with our health but not with our wealth, do we really trust God?

If we trust God with our job but not with our house payments, do we really trust God?

You have over the years heard both Pastor Don and me say that "if God brings you to it, He'll bring you through it." **Do we believe that?**

Every day and every event are matters of faith in God's provisions. **Would you agree with me?**

When I get in my car to drive to the store or to the office or to the park is faith involved?

When I pull out my wallet and purchase gas or groceries or take my checkbook and pay utilities or insurance, is faith involved?

When I go next week to the doctor for my annual physical, is faith involved?

Whether or not we want to admit it, faith should be a part of those and all daily events. **But is it?** We may jump in the car and drive to the store and not think anything about it. We may pump our car with gas and pay the attendant and not think anything of it. But let me assure you that faith is involved every day and that faith either grows or shrinks depending on how we respond to those events. **Are we going to believe that God will provide and so grow our faith or are we going to continue to trust our own resources?**

Today I can have a lot of faith and trust God in every event that comes my way. Tomorrow may be a different story. The littlest event may be the very thing that derails my faith. It may be the thing God wants to use to stretch me or it may be the thing that

I'm more inclined to resort to my old ways and means of doing things and faith has little to do with how I respond. **Do you find that true in your experience?** That's what we see with Abram.

We have a very lengthy passage today and I will not be going verse by verse. What I want for you to get from the passage about Abram is to see his walk of faith and how God provided. To the degree that he walked by faith is the degree to which God honored. Turn to **Genesis 12-15:6**.

I don't want you to miss God's provision to this servant. His is a story of faith, sometimes it was lacking, sometimes it was lagging, and sometimes it was looming.

This passage reveals three things about his faith.

It reveals his call to faith

It reveals his crisis of faith

It reveals his change in faith

By the way, I have chosen to use the KJV today. Follow with me in verses 1-3.

Right away we see that God appeared to Abram. Whether it was just audible or actually a visit in person by the Lord is uncertain.

What we know is that God gave Abram a command. Leave your country and your kinfolk. This is his first step of faith. He will have others in this passage as well.

His first test of faith was to leave everything he knew and all the family ties he had and travel to an unknown land, a land God would show him. That's a pretty big request. **What would you or I do?** Understand that Abram and God didn't have a long track record. Abram didn't grow up in a God fearing home. He wasn't surrounded by God fearing people. There wasn't a pastor or Sunday school teacher to mentor him. One day as an adult God revealed Himself to Abram. How, we don't know but Abram knew this God was different than

the pagan gods his family, ancestors and culture believed in. They were idolaters.

In some way God impressed on the heart of Abram that He was the true and living God and He was inviting Abram on a journey of faith to trust Him every step of the way instead of following the idols of his kin and country. If Abram trusted God, God would take him to some unknown destination.

Several years ago, Robyn and David decided to surprise me and take me out to dinner. They blindfolded me and then proceeded to drive all over in and out of subdivisions and around in circles to try and disorient me. I tried to follow the turns and notice the feel of the road. When we finally stopped, they asked if I knew where we were. I said it was Old Country Buffet. I could tell.

Abram had no clue where God was leading. It was a test of his faith to trust God to lead and provide.

Now something else you need to understand is that the culture where Abram was living was pretty well advanced. They had a lot of things going for them. From what archeologists have dug up in the region of Ur where Abram lived some believe he may have even had running water inside his house.

Okay God, you're asking me to give up that for tent dwelling? That's what many missionaries do. When my folks first announced to the extended family that we were moving to go north and work at a Christian camp, my great-grandmother was concerned. She really thought there were only outhouses that far north.

God told Abram to get up and go to a land he didn't know but God would show him.

Now these verses also tell us why God was taking him to this new land. God had a purpose. Notice in verses 2 and 3 the promises, the provisions and the protection God would give to Abram if he had faith

in God and followed Him. We have the benefit of looking back in history through the pages of Scripture to understand that the plan of God was to bring the Messiah who was promised in Genesis 3 through his lineage.

Two weeks ago I said *both faith and obedience are required, they go together*. Both are required for God's blessings. God gave promises but faith and obedience were required.

Hebrews 11:6 "But without faith it is impossible to please God, for he that comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."

What can't you do without faith? Please God and God rewards the faith of those who seek Him.

Abram will learn that lesson. He had no land and he had no heir, yet God said if you go I will... Notice how many times God said **"I will."**

Verse 1 – "I will show you a land."

Verse 2 – "I will make of you a great nation."

Let me just remind you here about this promise from something we learn in **chapter 11:30 "But Sarai (his wife) was barren: she had no child."**

Verse 2 – "I will bless you, and make your name great; and you will be a blessing."

Verse 3 – "I will bless them that bless you."

Verse 3 – "I will curse them that curse you."

Also implied in verse 3 **I will bless the families of the earth through you.**

Did you learn last week that God has plans for you?

You don't have to be an Abram or a Moses or even a Paul to realize that God has plans for you. They don't necessarily have to be big plans like starting a nation or leading a people out of bondage or even establishing churches where there are none, but God has plans that are only for you. **Will you walk by faith trusting that God will provide along the way?**

When God says **"I will"** He means it. He won't go back on His Word or change His mind or change

the conditions. God was making a promise to Abram of some pretty significant things if he would walk by faith. Let's see how Abram did.

Verse 4 – “So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him.” So far, so good. He left his old country.

Here's where his faith goes south. **What had he been told to do?** Leave your country and your kin. Notice in verse 1 a little three letter word. It's the word **“had,”** past tense. God had spoken to him earlier and we read in the end of chapter 11 that Abram's father Terah and his nephew had traveled with him from Ur to Haran. I believe that it was in Ur that God called him to walk by faith. He left his country but not his kin. He took his father and nephew. Notice also that instead of going to the land God would take him, they made a stop in Haran.

Abram's faith was incomplete. Instead of leaving all his kin, some went with him. Instead of going to a land God would show him, he took a detour. *God will not bless when we disobey.* Some of you may know what I'm talking about. God may have called you to some test of faith but your step of faith is incomplete. “God, I'll follow you, but I'll follow you on my terms, in my way, and in my time.”

It may not be on the mountain's height
Or over the stormy sea;
It may not be at the battle's front
My Lord will have need of me.
But if by a still, small voice He calls
To paths that I do not know,
I'll answer, dear Lord, with my hand in thine,
“I'll go where You want me to go.”

When you read through this passage you will find that when Abram began to obey is when God began to bless.

In verse 4 we see that Abram left Haran and he's on his way to the land God would show him, but Lot is

still with him. He's on his way to the land but now he's 75 and still has no heir and his obedience is incomplete.

In this section we see that when God called and Abram began to obey, he also worshipped.

That's the same with us. When we walk by faith and in obedience step out to follow God trusting Him to lead and provide we will respond in worship, but when we walk by sight and our faith is incomplete worship is lacking.

God appeared to Abram as he traveled and told him that this was the land that would be given to his seed. God had brought him to the land, but still had no heir. When it speaks of pitching his tent it is a reference to settling in, making it home. This was where he and his people would live. It may not be significant to you but notice where he pitched his tent. On the one side is Bethel and on the other is Ai. Bethel means House of God (it would later be the place where King Jeroboam would establish a place of worship and eventually become a place of idolatry). Ai means ruin. Those are the only two choices we have: we can either dwell in the presence of God by faith or we can dwell in the place of ruin when we don't follow God. Living in a tent reminded him that he was a foreigner in the land, building an altar reminded him that his citizenship was in heaven.

Hebrews 11:8-10

They were a witness that he followed God. Again Abram built an altar and called on God. But something happens in verse 10 that is to be another test of his faith. Famine.

Famine is defined as an acute and general shortage of food, to wither away. We aren't told the extent of this famine or how long it lasted. We are just told that there was famine and that it was “grievous.” That means it was harsh, severe, lots of suffering. Every day Abram opened up the flaps of

his tent and saw families with suitcases in hand headed south.

“Sarai, there go the Smith’s and the Johnson’s. Looks like the Adam’s are leaving too.”

One day he probably said to Sarai, “well the famine is getting worse and most families have left, we probably should fold up the tents and head south too.” And that’s what they did. They packed up and headed to Egypt. It doesn’t say that he prayed about it or sought the will of God. He was told in verse 1 to leave his country and go to a place God would show him. In that promise was the promise of provision and protection. If he trusted God, God would take care of him, even in a famine.

Maybe you know about famines. Oh, not the kind that devastate a land or a farm, but maybe you know about a famine of the soul. Life changes or life events have occurred and you wonder if God is around or if God cares or if God even knows. You feel dry inside. Alone. Empty. It feels like a famine is coming on and it’s at this point you have some decisions – trust in God’s provision or trust in your own. Abram did the latter – he trusted in his own resources. He saw the famine and came to the logical conclusion that if they didn’t pack up they wouldn’t be able to meet their needs. I have said before that trusting God by faith often times doesn’t make sense, it stands against all reason and logic. Abram didn’t trust God enough yet to believe that God would provide what He promised.

Do you have enough faith to believe that if God brought you to it, He’ll bring you through it? Do you have enough faith to believe that God can provide even in a time of famine?

One day the disciples were faced with a decision to trust the Lord or trust their resources. Walk by faith or walk by sight. Thousands of people had gathered to listen to the Lord all day. It was late and they told the Master all the people should leave. Jesus said they were hungry, feed them. Lord, we don’t

have enough money to buy that much food. In essence they were saying, we don’t have enough faith. Andrew had a little more faith than the rest. Hey there’s this kid who has a lunch with a few biscuits and a couple fish. But what is that compared to all these people. It’s only enough to feed a child.

Have them sit down.

After praying and breaking, they passed out the food and the Bible says that everyone had enough to eat so that they were all satisfied.

I’ve been with the teens when they eat and it takes a lot to satisfy them. The entire crowd ate and were satisfied.

God’s provisions, even in famine, would have been enough to satisfy Abram. Instead of trusting God he trusted his own instincts and that decision would get him in trouble.

On the way he discussed with Sarai how beautiful she was. It wasn’t just a compliment. He was saying that her beauty could be the end of him. Later on we learn that this very deception was something they used on other occasions. They would deceive others about their relationship. In that culture you could kill a husband to take his wife as your own and Abram didn’t want to die. He was trusting in his own scheming for protection rather than trusting in God to protect him. After all didn’t he have that promise that through him there would come a great nation and through him all the nations would be blessed?

Their plan backfired though because it was Pharaoh who took her to be his wife. God stepped in before anything else could happen and struck the Egyptians with a plague. Even in the midst of Abram’s lack of faith God was protecting them because He had a plan for them. And remember, Sarai was just as much a part of the plan of an heir as Abram.

By their going to Egypt they demonstrated a lack of trust in God's provision during the famine and their deception in Egypt about their relationship was a lack of trust in God's protection.

Here's something to consider from this story. **How many blessings will we miss out on because we left the land of promise during a famine in our life to follow our own path thinking that was the best way to go?**

God had to get them out of Egypt to bring them back to the land He had promised them. He sent a plague. Pharaoh put things together and exiled them from his land forcing them to leave. When we get out of the will of God, He will sometimes use extreme measures to get us back to where He wants us.

For about 10 years I was working in Ann Arbor at a company where I was content. I liked my job in HR and I liked the people. But that wasn't where God wanted me to be. Through a series of circumstances which included 14 hour work days and an hour commute each way, Robyn and I had some very long discussions. She believed I needed to be back in pastoral ministry again and well, here I am. I had spent enough time in my Egypt and God was calling me back to His land.

Two things happened in Egypt that will cause problems down the road, one immediate, the other happens later on. The first is that while they were in Egypt both he and Lot became very wealthy. The second is that most scholars believe that it was in Egypt where they acquired Hagar. His time in Egypt was a crisis of faith.

13:3 tells us that they returned to their former home between Bethel and Ai where he built that earlier altar and again called on the Lord. His renewed trust in God led again to worship. I believe that when we walk in obedience the result is always worship. If you don't feel like worshipping God

then ask yourself if there is an area of your life where you are not trusting God. *Our worship is the response of genuine faith and willing obedience.*

Abram had to learn not to be afraid but to trust God at His word. Walking by faith eliminates fear. God will provide.

Hebrews 13:5-6

Psalm 23:4

When we read "fear not" in the Bible it is really saying trust God, He will provide.

Abram is starting to get it, but chapter 13 tells us about the problem that came because he brought his nephew Lot along. Their herdsman began to quarrel over the fields. We are told that the Canaanites and Perezites were living in the land. They had already possessed the best parts. These newcomers had too much to sustain them together. Though the land was given to his descendants, Abram allowed Lot to choose first where he would go. Out of selfishness he chose the best part. That decision would be his undoing, but that's another message.

More and more Abram is walking by faith. We see again in chapter 13 that God repeated the promise of land and an heir. As he walked through the land at God's direction, Abram settled in Hebron and built yet another altar, another time of worship. It's another example that when we walk by faith, worship will follow.

There is more in chapter 14 than just Lot's capture and deliverance. There is more than just the principle of tithing. Don't miss this. After the victory he met two kings. The king of Sodom offered him all the spoils if he would return the people. The king of Salem offered him bread and wine. The two kings represent two ways of life, two choices we must make. Sodom was a wicked city and the king represents the world system with its desire for worldly things. The king's name,

Bera, means gift and suggests that in order to gain what the world has to offer, we need to bargain for it but at a great price. If Abram took the offer it meant allegiance to this king, this world system. Sodom means burning and suggests that if you choose to follow this king everything will one day be burned up, it won't last. And that's what happened to Lot. Because he loved this world, everything he had was burned up.

Melchizedek means king of righteousness and Salem means peace. Hebrews 7 and Psalm 110 both point to this king as representative of Christ who alone is the king of righteousness offering us an eternal peace as we obediently trust and follow Him. His provision will last forever.

Warren Wiersbe writes that when Abram rejected the offer by King Bera and accepted the offer of King Melchizedek he was really saying take the world and give me Jesus. Abram was also showing that he was now going to trust God for his provisions rather than trust man. We see that he displays another act of worship by giving Melchizedek a tithe. Tithes are giving back a tenth of what God has blessed us with as an act of worship. It was an expression of love and devotion to God and a statement that silently said he would trust God for his provisions.

Chapter 15 opens with a reaffirmation from God of the promises He made to Abram. It was again an invitation not to fear but to trust and follow.

It is also an affirmation of Abram's faith, a faith that began in Ur of the Chaldeans and would be with him 100 years later. It was not his actions that brought righteousness, it was his faith.

If he was going to receive the promises and provisions of God, he would have to walk by faith. He would have to align with God's will. When we walk by faith believing God will provide then we are really saying that God's will becomes our will.

Abram had to learn to let go of his will to follow God's. When he didn't, trouble ensued, when he did, God blessed, but you will notice that the tests of faith became harder. There were some growing pains along the way, but then that's the thing about faith - there will always be growing pains. And here's something else we learn. Abram was 75 when he began teaching us that God wants to develop our faith regardless of our age. It is here that we begin to see a change in his faith.

Has God been speaking to you about trusting Him for His provisions?

Has He been asking you to give up your will to follow Him in obedience?

Have you resisted that call of faith?

Are you in a crisis of faith?

This morning I want to do something a little different as we close. I'm going to have Randy come and lead us in our closing hymn. This is a test of faith. If God has spoken to you because you've left the land He wants you to be in to follow your own way, I want you to come forward so I can pray with you.

If God has spoken to you because you want to begin today to trust God for His provisions I want you to come forward so I can pray with you.

Only you and God know what He is asking you to do. **Will you walk by faith and be obedient to trust Him or will you walk by sight?** Abram's life shows us what happens in both situations. Someone has said the power of faith is the power of God.

The altar is open, will you obey the Lord?