

Guest Preacher Rev Colin Macleod

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[0 : 0 0] Well, as we turn together in our Bibles to Genesis and chapter 12, we remind ourselves of the words we've just sung to all who put their trust in him, a shield and refuge is the Lord.

Words of encouragement and reassurance to take heart from this morning as we consider the call of Abram that we have read together from there in Genesis and chapter 12, where 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 of you a great nation and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonors you, I will curse and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

So Abram went as the Lord had told him. The flow of Scripture is itself very revealing and if we were to be reading our Bibles from the beginning in sequence, we would have had a tough time reading from Genesis 3 up to this point in Genesis 12 because it is a tale on a list of a dismal failure of sin and rebellion and lawlessness, which very much culminates in chapter 11 and verse 4 where we see the expression of lawlessness.

The people said, come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens. Let us make a name for ourselves. It had become all about them and not about God.

[1 : 4 6] The Creator has been relegated and sidelined. God has been all but forgotten about. Thus we see the ultimate expression of lawlessness and sin, which is to reject God and rebel before him.

And so there's a heaviness. And then we come to chapter 12 and God begins to reveal his plan of redemption. We see that God is good.

He saves them from themselves by dispersing them, by introducing among the people at this time different languages that forced them apart and so dissipated.

They're coming together in conference. They're conferencing in lawlessness. God is good in that way. But the goodness of God is seen, of course, in what happens next.

And in the book of Beginnings, in Genesis, the focus becomes very much upon the heart and the home and the life of Abram and his family.

[2 : 4 6] And so we zoom right in and we hear God dealing with this man in a quite powerful and wonderfully gracious way. So I think this morning with you about God's call, his call to Abram and Abram's response.

And what that could say to us together this morning. Now the overarching theme here, the canvas upon which the call is presented to us in Genesis, we shouldn't forget, is this God who takes the initiative here.

In redemption, in salvation, it is God who takes the initiative. And we see that everywhere in Scripture. The most famous verse of all reminds us of this. For God so loved the world that he gave.

With God, it's not just about theology and systematics and themes. It's about action.

God loved and God gave. And Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And here we see the beginning of God's plan being revealed to us.

[3 : 47] And it centers on his calling, Abram. Now it's the nature of this call that we can learn very much from as we study the Scripture together. It's instructive. Because as we consider this ancient incident and the father of our faith in Abram, we need to step back and assess ourselves.

It holds a mirror. The Scripture always presents a mirror. And so before looking anywhere else, we look here. And we say, what is the Lord teaching me through this incident?

What is it that God's call and God's plan of redemption and Abram's response and Abram's faith, what does that say to me about how I am to live my life? How do I get things right with the Lord God today?

Blessed are those who keep his laws. In Psalm 119 we've sung. Who with their whole heart seek the Lord. And so we seek him together today to study this call of Abram.

And the first thing we see in the language and what's presented to us is the need for obedience. That's the first thing that stands out. Notice the first word in God's dealings with Abram.

[4 : 55] Go. This is not a discussion. It's not a debate. This is a declaration. It is an instruction. It is a command. Go from your country, your kindred, and your father's house to the land 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. How does Abram respond in verse 4? So Abram went as the Lord had told him.

Obedience. It's an immediate contrast to what I mentioned at the beginning. Chapters 3 to 11. We could sum up as a, I guess, a presentation of disobedience.

Where sin is rampant and rebellion before God is everywhere. And people are full of themselves. And there is all sorts of expressions and indulgences in sinfulness.

And now we have this man who bucks the trend and did as the Lord had told him. Here is wonderful, simple, glorious obedience.

[6 : 05] People having refused to live by God's ways, having turned to their own paths, provide a stark contrast. And that's what we see here in Abram, first of all.

We find this emphasis everywhere in Scripture, particularly, of course, when it comes to pleasing God, honoring God, and serving God. The Apostle Peter helps us here in chapter 4.

And so Peter was reminding Christians then and us today that when you come to God in faith, when you respond in repentance and faith and turn from, as the Thessalonians are famously described, turn to God from idols to serve the living God, there's an immediate about-turn.

There's a contrast. You're now going in a different way, Christian friend. You're no longer on the broad way that leads to destruction, or on the narrow way that leads to eternal life. And this move takes place through simple, wholehearted obedience.

And so in Abram, we see a great emphasis together today. When God calls and when we respond, you instantly begin to walk a different path.

[7 : 33] In Romans in chapter 4, it's described there in verse 11, in these words, that, let me find this now, in chapter 12, chapter 4 in verse 12, you who walk in the footsteps of the faith.

Just pause there for a minute. You who walk in the footsteps of the faith. That's where God is looking today. The wrapper and the tin, I hope, made that clear today.

That God is looking to your heart, to my heart today. Are we walking in the footsteps of the faith? The footsteps of the faith, exemplified by us, by Abraham, in his simple obedience, in his trust.

We'll think about that in a moment as well. And are you today on this different path, or are you still on the path, the broad way that leads to destruction, still uncertain, unconvinced, unconverted, saying, no, I need more.

I need something else. I need something. I need God to show me something that's going to so impress me that I'll have no option or no other alternative but to, at that point, become a Christian.

[8 : 46] Be very, very careful if that thinking is taking root in your mind today. Because, because if you're saying that kind of thing to God in response to the gospel, what you're saying is the cross is not enough.

The death of Christ, that's not enough. His dead body in the tomb, that's not enough. I want something else. I need something more. I want something to happen to make me think, oh, so that's what God is saying to me.

Well, I can respond to that if you're responding to something other than the cross. You see how lawlessness, what a word that is that describes and defines sin.

Sin is to do what God forbids and not do what God commands. And to despise the cross is the ultimate expression of that heart of sinfulness.

But the problem is, of course, that the vast majority around us are in that position, are on that broad way, and are not walking in the footsteps of the faith, but are walking according to how they see things, and how culture sees things, how the world sees things.

[9 : 52] And what is the world? The world is darkness. The world is ruled by sinfulness. The world is a place of rebellion that refuses to acknowledge and give God the glory and the praise and all the esteem that is due to his name.

The world puts self first, which is why these words of Peter are so helpful. You no longer live for human passions, but for the will of God. With respect to this, they are surprised you do not join them.

Sometimes, Christians, we can struggle with that sense of surprise. It can be so intimidating, so overwhelming at times. We think we don't want to stand out. We just want to be the same as everybody else.

But that is not the path to pleasing and honoring God. Blessed are those who keep his laws, who with their whole heart seek the Lord.

And that seeking begins with obedience. The ultimate call of the gospel, come to me, and I will give you rest. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.

[11 : 01] Obedience, and the obedience of Abraham Abraham has much to commend to us today. In Hebrews in chapter 11, or we read in Hebrews chapter 11, and in verse 8, these words, By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive and an inheritance.

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.

For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. Abraham's heart was right, and we see that in his obedience.

Secondly, in his obeying the Lord, we also see trust. Trust. This first word, go, Abraham doesn't step back and, well, let's discuss this, God.

Where am I to go? How long will it take to get there? What can I expect when I'm there? What will the conditions? What will the people, how will they react to me? How will they respond? Will we be safe on the way? I need to look after my family. I have responsibility.

[12 : 16] The list goes on and on, if we allow it. But the first word Abraham heard was, go. Go from your country, your kindred, and your father's house to land.

I will show you and so we have this wonderful trust. He was to move from Haran, having already left Aran. This is interesting. They'd left Ar and they'd come halfway to Canaan and stopped, we're not told quite for how long or why, at Haran and settled there.

They've come only halfway. Halfway is not good enough for God. It's the whole heart that God requires. And so they're told, Abraham, you've only come to Haran.

You must go from here to the land that I will show you. And so God's call does not leave room for negotiation. And we see Abraham here at his best.

Despite the cost, despite the uncertainty, despite not knowing what lay ahead, Abraham went. Abraham went as the Lord had told him. And he trusts in the one who has told him and called him and has promised to lead him and protect him and provide for him.

[13 : 26] For Abraham, that's enough. He's in God's care. He understands God's got this. I'm going to respond accordingly. I've often been taken by an incident that's recorded in the life and times of Robert Murray McShane, that famous minister who achieved so much in his young life in his very short ministry in the Church of Scotland in Dundee in the 19th century.

And there's an incident there that's recorded of his hearing of a female relative that has made it known, the gospel, the church, this Christianity, that's not for me.

And having heard of this cousin of his, he went home and he penned in his diary these words. She has chosen the world in its paltry crowd.

She has chosen the world in an endless shroud. She has chosen the world in its misnamed pleasures. She has chosen the world before heaven's own treasures.

He was so moved to hear of this rejection of the gospel that moved him to pen these words that say so much about the heart that is gripped in disobedience.

[14 : 45] And there's no trust. One of the most famous verses in the Bible that keeps coming up, I'm sure, in sermons and in your thinking and trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.

In all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct your paths. Here is a glorious example of that promise. The pattern that we follow and the promise we claim is here.

So Abraham went as the Lord had told him. He knew enough. And what he knew was that the Lord was in charge of this process and so he makes his way.

And you'll notice in this that it is an uncompromising call. He was to go from country, kindred and his father's house. Comfort, security, familiarity, all to be left behind.

Go. And I want to just contrast that with the flow of the language that's in these first few verses in Genesis 12. Because we have opposite your country, we have the Lord's word, I will show you.

[15 : 51] And opposite your kindred, we put the words, I will make of you. And opposite your father's house, we have, I will bless you. And what a contrast this is.

We have the phrase, I will. Six times between verses 2 and 7, the Lord pouring his assurance into the heart and mind of Abraham. I will show you, I will make of you, I will bless you.

Abraham, I've got this. I've got you. So, Abraham went as the Lord had told him. We may think, well, we don't have a call of this nature, we don't have a call of this clarity, we don't have a call that's so powerful and personal.

no, yes, we do. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. The promise of the gospel revealed in the face of Jesus who came into this world to seek and to save the lost, to bring us from darkness to light, to bring us from death to life, to bring us from being afar off, to make us near by the blood of Christ.

In him, wrote Paul to Ephesians in chapter 1, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us.

[17 : 15] The grace and graciousness and provision of God in the gospel is beyond our imagining and we can't measure this, this inexpressible gift given by God and what are we to do in response?

We are to obey. We are to trust. Through Abraham, of course, the promised saviour finally comes and in the New Testament we see in high definition the wonder of God's plan which is beginning to take shape here through this man and we think, what a man, what a family.

They had it so easy and they were set. No. Well, chapter 12 and the first section we've read together is glorious and gracious.

The second half of the chapter, oh my goodness, we see that the best of men are men at best and Abraham falls flat on his face with misjudgment and an error of judgment and weakness and uncertainty and so the story goes.

It will ebb and flow right through his whole life. Abraham very often gets things right and quite often gets things badly wrong and yet God in his grace and mercy holds on to this man and his family for God has a promise and a purpose.

[18 : 35] I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonours you I will curse and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed which we see in the birth of Christ in Bethlehem.

Through Abraham the promised saviour comes into the world and his name is above every name and it is a greater than Abraham that is here today calling us all to trust and believe.

There's a notable third response here in Abraham to the call of God and that we see in verses 7 and 8 and his response is worship. Worship. Notice what happens in verses 7 and 8 when he comes into Canaan.

He says here that the Lord appeared to Abraham and said to your offspring I will give this land. Note the response. So he built there an altar to the Lord who would appear to him.

The purpose of an altar to sacrifice to worship to pray and to praise. It goes on. From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east and there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord.

[19 : 50] There is a string of altars now appearing in this man's world. He builds an altar to the Lord. He worships God. He's unashamed.

He is open and he is clear. And in this action in this activity we see a man whose heart is full of devotion and love and adoration and he is unashamed of anyone around knowing this about him.

And so he builds an altar. This phrase here calls upon the name of the Lord a really interesting phrase that's used I think it's back in Genesis 4. It's the first phrase we read of in the Bible that describes the response of prayer and praise to God.

Some scholars believe that the phrase called upon the name of the Lord has both a private and a public emphasis. It's not just about prayer and praise it's about proclamation and maybe that's the case.

It certainly seems to be that there is an unabashed open giving of praise and worship to God at this point. He builds an altar. He marks his steps.

[20 : 59] The footsteps of the faith are marked now by a series of altars as Abraham worships the Lord. What an encouragement this is to us together today to nurture the same characteristics in our hearts that we would obey trust and worship the Lord.

This is when the church is at our very best. There's lots of things we have to be engaged in. There's lots of programs and plans and strategies. They all have their place. Of course they do. But they must come from the center ground, the heart of the church and our heart is to give God the praise and the glory.

We read in Psalm 115 when we open our service, Not to us, Lord, not to us, but to your name be all the praise and all the glory that is due. This is the Lord our God.

And we are called to devote ourselves to him. We sang in Psalm 95, O come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord our maker, for he is our God.

And we are the people of his pasture, the sheep of his hand. God cares for and holds his people today. Remember that, Christian friend, whatever you're facing in your life, if there's pressure or uncertainty, difficulty, hardship, heartache, often these things make themselves at home and often unexpectedly and most unwelcomely.

[22 : 31] Remember, you don't face these things alone. Abraham didn't know where he was going. He didn't know what was around the corner, what lay ahead. He didn't know what dangers and difficulties there were, but he went as the Lord had told him.

He obeyed, he trusted, and he worshipped. As we develop in these characteristics, we too will be at our very best as individuals, as a congregation, as a denomination.

Trust, obedience, worship. There's one more to notice just to finish this morning. We see that in the language of verse 9. From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent with Bethel in the west and Ai on the east and there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord and then in verse 9 Abraham journeyed on, still going toward the Negev.

What we have here is commitment. Perseverance. And they flow and go together. Here's the links of the chain. Obey, trust, worship, serve, and do so with commitment.

Abraham was committed, fuelled by God's promises. He keeps going. He digs in. He shows tenacity. He perseveres.

[23 : 57] It's no mistake that the Bible uses very clear language to describe the Christian life and we don't find the phrase cakewalk, bed of roses, easy.

These things do not describe or define the Christian life by any way, shape, or form. What language does? Fight the good fight. Put on the whole armor of God.

Run the race that is set before you with endurance. We need to persevere, Christian friends. There's no promise of an easy time. We've been looking the last few weeks, midweek, at Pilgrim's Progress, the Christian classic that Bunyan wrote.

I hope, I'm sure you're all familiar with it in some way, shape, or form. What a book that is. I've always been fascinated with chapter one. The title of the book, sometimes you read chapter one and you have to turn back to the book and say, Pilgrim's Progress.

It's more like Pilgrim's Lack of Progress. He's not getting anywhere here, which makes it so relatable. Remember, he's discovered outside the city of destruction with a great burden on his back crying out, What must I do to be saved?

[25 : 04] And Evangelist says, Go. Do you see the gate? Do you see the light? He heads straight for it. What does Pilgrim do? Makes his way. The next thing, pliable and obstinate are in there and they're trying to dissuade him and argue with him and pull him back and the next thing is in the slough of the spawn.

He gets out of there and he manages then to begin to make his way but what happens, Mr. Worldly Wiseman says, Where are you going? You need to head to the village of morality and speak to Mr. Legality.

That's how you'll get rid of your burden and he's straying off the path and we say, Where's the progress that Pilgrim's making? But Evangelist comes along and says, What are you doing here? There's the pathway.

There's the light. There's the gate. And off he goes back on the path. The Christian life requires commitment and especially for you friends at a time of vacancy and change, you don't know what lies ahead, what's around the corner but remember, God cares for and God holds his people.

the church is so precious to Christ. He died to bring his church into being. He gave his life.

[26 : 15] He gave his blood. Through his blood we have redemption and the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of his grace. God will never let his church go.

And so, in response to that reality, we obey, we trust, we worship, we endure. We take the language from Abraham.

He journeyed on, still going toward the Negev. He shows great commitment here. Blessed are those who keep his laws, who with their whole heart seek the Lord.

You have a great mission here as a congregation to show forth the praises of the one who called you from darkness into his marvelous light. That's your wonderful privilege and responsibility here in this community.

That's why God has raised you up and set you down and keeps you here to be a witness to your Savior, to talk of Christ as and when you can, to allow your life to speak, to be witnesses in a dark world.

[27 : 25] So let us learn from Abraham to be wholehearted and unreserved and unashamed. In our mission, we make it our aim to please him.

That's how the Apostle Paul puts it a number of times in the New Testament. What a focus that is for every congregation we make it our aim to please him. It will be draining and challenging, at times difficult and frustrating, but we endure.

We show commitment. We show tenacity. And we remember how to run, how to witness, how to serve. We do so looking unto Jesus.

And may he bless one and all in doing so. for the promises were made to Abraham and his offspring. That's us.

Through and in Christ, our Lord and Saviour and Friend. And may he bless you in your ongoing work and ministry here in the community that he has called you to serve to his glory.

[28 : 31] Let's pray for a moment together. Lord, we pray today for your guidance in these things. We see Abraham, our father in the faith.

We see his footsteps of obedience and trust, worship and commitment. Lord, may these things speak to us today. And may we, by grace, nurture within our own hearts and lives these very same characteristics.

to your name be all the praise and all the glory. Be with, Lord, all your people here as they seek to serve and witness to your name in this community.

Be with them, Lord, in Jesus' name. Amen. So we'll close our service this morning. We'll turn to Sing Psalms and Psalm 28.

Psalm 28 and Sing Psalms page 33 in our Blue Psalm books. Singing from verse 6 to the end. Praise to the Lord for he has heard the plea for mercy which I made.

[29 : 35] He is my strength. He is my shield. I trust in him who sends me aid. We'll sing from verse 6 to the end to God's praise. Praise to the Lord for he has heard love me for mercy which I made.

He is my strength. He is my shield. I trust in him who sends me aid.

my heart uplifted leaves for joy.

My thanks to him I gladly sing.

the Lord God is his people's strength.

[30 : 59] a saving fortress for his king.

Lord, save your people, your home of love.

be ye pleased, be ye pleased, your heritage to bless.

be ye their good shepherd, carry them forever in your faithfulness.

may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen. Amen.