

1. The call and the faith of our father

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[0 : 00] Well good afternoon everybody and you're very welcome to the Tron lunchtime service, especially if you're visiting or if this is your first time with us. I hope you feel at home. We begin a new three-week series in the book of Genesis.

So I'd like to invite you to turn to Genesis chapter 12 and we're going to be learning from the life of Abraham. Genesis chapter 12 and we're going to read from verse 1 to 9.

Hear the word of the Lord. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

So Abraham went as the Lord had told him and Lot with him. Abraham was 75 years old when he departed from Haran.

And Abraham 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.

[1 : 28] When they came to the land of Canaan, Abraham passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the Oak of Morah. At that time the Canaanites were in the land.

Then the Lord appeared to Abraham 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 Abraham journeyed on. Still going toward the Negev. Where in the scripture can we turn to see someone responding to the gospel of God by the obedience of faith?

And the answer of course is Genesis 12. That is what we see in this account of the call of Abraham. We see the living God preaching the gospel to a sinful and lost man.

[2 : 37] And then we see that man carrying out real repentance and exercising Christian faith in response. This is something we need to be clear on.

The fact that the call of Abraham is not the beginning of the Jewish faith. But rather it's the beginning of the Christian faith. The Bible is so clear on this point. If you don't believe me then just read the New Testament epistles.

Read Romans 4. Or Hebrews 11. Or just think of Galatians chapter 3 verse 8. Where the apostle Paul says that in Genesis 12. When God called Abraham to go.

Paul says that God was preaching the gospel to Abraham. Not a different gospel from the one that we've received. But the same gospel. And so that is why the New Testament also tells us.

That if we want to learn what it means to be a true believer. Then we must look back to Abraham and learn from his life. Learn from the way he responded to the call of the gospel.

[3 : 40] Indeed that's why Moses himself wrote about Abraham in the book of Genesis to the Israelites. He is the man of faith that God's people are to look to and learn from.

So for the next few weeks we'll be doing that today as the people of God. But having said all that we also need to remember that Moses didn't just record the account of Abraham's life.

To make us solely focus upon Abraham. No. Moses also wants us to focus upon Abraham's God. And upon what that God did in and through Abraham.

And that will be an enormous encouragement to us. Because of course Abraham's God is also our God. Well with all that in mind I want us to notice three things this afternoon.

About the Lord's call to Abraham. Firstly notice it is an utterly undeserved call. Please look at verse 1. Now the Lord said to Abraham.

[4 : 43] Moses wants us to be totally clear that the call of Abraham was completely 100% initiated by the Lord. This call hasn't come about because Abraham deserved favour from the Lord.

Or that the Lord saw something of merit within Abraham. Not at all. The Lord calls Abraham and it's completely 100% a gift of divine grace.

I think if you ask most people in the church today what they think of Abraham. I think it's fair to say that when most people in the church think of Abraham. They tend to think of him really warmly. Like he's some kind of a good guy.

A nice old man. Type of chap you would like to have as your grandfather. Someone who's pretty wholesome. But that just isn't right. Abraham was a total pagan.

He came from a really shady background. And we're told in the latter verses of chapter 11 in Genesis. That he came from Ur of the Chaldeans. And we know from the history books that Ur of the Chaldeans was a great centre of paganism.

[5 : 47] Especially moon worship that involved all sorts of evil behaviour and dodgy practices. And it seems that Abraham's family were immersed in that paganism. In fact the very names of Abraham's father Terah and his wife Sarai.

They're both probably derived from the names of pagan gods. From moon gods. And just listen to Joshua chapter 24 verse 2. Written hundreds of years after the days of Abraham.

It says this. The Lord, the God of Israel says. Long ago your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates. Terah, the father of Abraham and Nahor.

And they served other gods. That was Abraham. He was an out and out pagan. Immersed in evil ideology. And yet the living God calls him.

And bursts onto the centre stage in his life here in Genesis 12. And you might be asking. Why? Why did God call a pagan idolater like him?

[6 : 54] Why did God choose someone who came from a family of idolaters? Of people who had exchanged the truth about God for a lie. And were worshipping the creation. Rather than worshipping the creator.

Why call such a man like this? And the answer is. We don't know why. We can't explain it.

God called Abraham. Simply because God chose to be gracious to him. And that is the mystery of divine grace, isn't it? And let me just say.

If you're a Christian here today. Then it is no different with you. If you think you know why. God has shown his grace to you. And if you think you know. You know.

If you think you've deserved it. Or because you're deserving of merit from God. Then it's clear that you don't understand yourself. And you don't have a foggiest idea of what grace is.

[7 : 51] Let me just say. If you're here. And if you're not yet a Christian. And if you're sitting there thinking. God could never call such a person like me. My past is too shady. I've got too much mess in my past.

God can never call someone like me. Well if that is you. Then please know. That you are exactly the type of person. That God calls out to in the gospel. Just look at Abraham. The call of the gospel. Is utterly undeserved. It is a gift of God's grace. Secondly. Notice. That it is also a call. That promises unimaginable blessings.

Please look at verse 1 to 3. Do you see what the Lord is saying here?

He's reaching out to Abraham. Abraham commanding him. And pulling him. Out of his old life. Of evil in the land of his father. To come instead. Into the light.

[9 : 06] Of the kingdom of God. It's almost as though the Lord is saying. Abraham leave behind your old life. Come and follow the way that I show you. And I promise that if you heed my call.

Then I will ultimately. Shower abundant blessings. Upon your life. And of course many of you. Who are here this afternoon. Who are Christians. You can testify.

That this very thing. Has happened in your life. When God reached into your life. Commanded you to change. And then he pulled you. Into a new life altogether. To trust in his son.

You too have shared the same experience. As Abraham here. And you really can testify. With your own life. That those who obey that gospel call of God. Will receive unimaginable blessings.

Blessings. Well what are these blessings. That the Lord is promising Abraham. There are different ways to analyze them. But I like the Dale Ralph Davis way.

[10 : 01] Of analyzing them. Listen to how he sums it up. He says. I call this. The quad promise. Because it consists of four components. And they all begin with the letter P. Which is good to remember.

Firstly. First component is people. The Lord tells Abraham. He will make him into a great nation. Verse 2. And he assures him that he will have offspring.

Verse 7. Second component is place. He tells Abraham that he will have a home. Verse 1. The land that the Lord will show him.

Which turns out to be. The land of Canaan. Verse 5 to 7. Third P is protection. He seeks to settle Abraham. By telling him.

I will bless those who bless you. And the one who dishonors you. I will curse. And sometimes. As you read on. You'll find that the protection element. Is cast in terms of presence.

[10:55] Such as in Genesis 28. Where the Lord says. I am with you. I shall keep you. Wherever you go. And fourth and finally.

The final P is program. The promise contains a program. Verse 3. And in you. All the families of the ground shall be blessed. So Abraham will become. A conduit.

Or a funnel. Through whom. The Lord will pour out his blessings. To the world. And to the nations. God is dead set on blessing the world. Despite all of the sin.

And rebellion that we read of. In Genesis 1 to 11. And he begins that blessing program. By calling Abraham. Friends. That is the quad promise.

People. Place. Protection. And program. And it's really. It's so important. That you get that into your minds. Because the rest of the book of Genesis. Is really all about the outworking. Of those promises.

[11:51] And in fact. Really the rest of the whole Bible. Is all about. The outworking of those promises. And just notice. The way in which these promises. Would have really reassured.

Abraham. For the Lord is saying. That it will be worth. Leaving behind your old life. Because you will gain. So much more. In the future. Just think about it. Abraham is called to leave behind.

His homeland. But he will receive. God's place of blessing. As his new home. Abraham is called to leave behind. His old household. The protection of his.

Membership in his old family. But he will receive. A new people from God. Abraham is to leave behind. The protection of his own kindred. But he will receive. Personal protection.

Of the living God himself. Who promises to be with him. At all times. And if Abraham. Obeys and. Leaves behind his old paganism. Then he will receive.

[12:48] The greatest privilege. Of all. He will not only be a receiver. Of the blessings from the Lord. But he will also become. A conduit. Of the Lord's blessings. To multitudes of others.

All over the world. All of the peoples. Will be blessed. Through him. And all of that. Is just really. It's the same promise.

In the gospel today. Isn't it? If you're. Here this afternoon. And if you're not yet. A Christian. Then please know. That this is what God promises. All those. Who obey the gospel. All those.

Who turn away from sin. And instead. Live under the rule. Of his son Jesus. The one in whom. All of God's promises. Find their fulfillment. God will shower. Every spiritual blessing.

Upon you. If you are in Christ. You'll be given. A place in the new heavens. And the new earth. Through the spirit of adoption. You'll be added. You'll be added to God's family.

[13:44] One of his own children. You will. Be. Forever. Living under God's protection. Forever. Knowing his loving presence. With you. Even in the darkest.

Moments of life. And like Abraham. If you're in Christ. You will become. A conduit of blessings. Yourself. God will. Use you. To bless the rest.

Of the world. Around you. And that will bring. Real joy. And satisfaction. To your soul. For you'll know. That your life. Is now of such great value. You're being used.

For the redemption purposes. Of God. Why would you ever refuse. Such a call as this? Of course. If you refuse. The call of the gospel. Then that means. That the opposite. Will be true. Of your life. Won't it? Refuse God's call. And you will never know.

[14:36] The wonderful. And certain hope. Of spending eternity. With Christ. In the new heavens. And the new earth. Instead. You will face. Eternity. Cut off from that paradise.

To face the punishment. That you deserve. For your rebellion. Refusing God's gospel call. Also means. That you'll never be part. Of his family. You can never call upon him. As your father. And you'll never know. The protection of God. Personally. You'll never experience. His loving presence. With you. In fact. You will face. All of the darkest moments. Of life.

On your own. Without God. And your soul. Will know nothing. Of the real joy. And satisfaction. That comes from being. A conduit. Of God's blessing.

To others. Ultimately. If you reject. God's call. In the gospel. Then you will experience. Nothing. But curse. From God. Again.

[15:31] Why would you ever choose. To reject. Such a call. As this. For it is a call. That promises. Unimaginable blessings. Well thirdly.

Notice. That it is also. A call. That demands. Undivided loyalty. It's a call. That demands. Undivided loyalty. The call of the gospel. Is.

A free gift. Of God's grace. But it is not. Cheap grace. The call of the gospel. Is a command. To give God. Your undivided loyalty. And costly obedience.

And that is what we see. Abraham doing. Please look at verse four. So Abraham. Went. As the Lord. Had told him. And Lot. Went with him. Abraham was 75 years old.

When he departed. From Haran. And Abraham. 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.

[16:28] In Haran. And they set out. To go to the land. Of Canaan. Now these verses. Tell us lots of details. Who went on the journey. How old Abraham was. At the time.

The destination. But the most important detail. Is there. At the start. Of verse four. So Abraham. Went. As the Lord.

Had told him. Friends. This is what the Bible. Means. By the obedience. Of faith. This is what real faith. Looks like. In the flesh. It means. Taking God's word. Seriously.

And acting upon it. Obediently. In response. To what you've heard. Faith is not just some. Kind of an abstract feeling. Neither is it simply. Paying lip service. To God.

But it is something. That masters. All of our beings. It's total obedience. In all that we are. To the Lord's word. That's what Abraham. Does here. And notice. What he does next.

[17:21] Please look at verse six. Abraham. Abraham. Abraham passed through the land. To the place at Shechem. To the oak of Morah. At that time. The Canaanites were in the land. Then the Lord appeared to Abraham.

And said. To your offspring. I will give this land. So he built an altar to the Lord there. Who had appeared to him. The Lord meets Abraham. And what encouragement that must have been.

Having just left behind all that was familiar. Having said farewell to family. His homeland. The Lord comes to him. And affirms that he really will deliver on his great blessings.

And verse seven. He says. To your offspring. I will give this land. The land of Canaan. And in response. Abraham builds an altar to the Lord. At the oak of Morah.

Now why is this here? What's Abraham doing? Answer. He is publicly declaring. His undivided loyalty. To the Lord. The oak of Morah.

[18:19] Could be translated. As the oak of the teacher. Most commentators. Reckon that it was therefore. Some sort of a pagan. Sacred hot spot. People would maybe go and. Sit under the tree.

And hear some special voices. In their head. But in spite of the pagan trappings. Abraham goes to that spot. And he stays faithful to the Lord.

And he builds. An altar to the Lord. That appeared to him. He doesn't mesh with the local liturgy. He doesn't blend in with the Canaanites. Who were in the land at that time. By worshipping their Canaanite deities.

No. Abraham exclusively. Worships the Lord. He's publicly declaring. Undivided loyalty. To the living God. And he does it again. Look at verse 8.

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.

[19:15] Again. This is acts of public worship. To the Lord. Calling on the name of the Lord. Could be referring to. Publicly praying. To the Lord. Or it could also be translated.

As publicly proclaiming. The name of the Lord. As in. Abraham was publicly telling others. Who the Lord is. And what he is like. In his gracious promises. But however you want to translate it.

It's clear. Abraham is unashamedly. Confessing his loyalty. And his devotion to the Lord. In front of his pagan. Canaanite neighbors. And don't miss the fact.

That in doing so. Abraham is already. Being a blessing. To the nations. For he is publicly proclaiming. In the name of the Lord. So that others might come.

To know the Lord. And friends. This is how. God wants all of us. To respond. To the gracious call. Of the gospel. He wants. Us to be a people.

[20 : 11] Who like Abraham. Are directed. By his word. And who are preoccupied. With worshipping him. In our everyday lives. Especially. In front of those.

Who do not know him. When I lived down south. In England. I once met up. For coffee with a man. He was in his 50s. He was also called Phil.

He had a great name. He was also called Phil. But he'd been a hardened. Atheist. For many years. Until one night. He came to church. He heard the same gospel call. That Abraham did.

And he responded. In exactly the same way. As Abraham. He turned away. From living his old life. To come under God's rule. Through his son. And you know. It didn't take long.

Before his undivided. Loyalty to the Lord. Started to spill out. Over into his everyday life. One example. That he told me about. As we had coffee together. Was that. He started to read his bible.

[21 : 05] During his lunch hour. At his work. In the staff room. He wasn't obviously. Trying to show off. In a false. Pious way. He was just simply. Sat in the corner. Unashamedly.

Reading the bible. And his workmates. Started to notice this. Some of them. Gave him stick. For doing so. But Phil didn't care. He couldn't help.

But let his new devotion. To the Lord. Who saved him. Spill out. Over into his everyday life. And the Lord wants all of us. To do that. And he wants all of us. As a church. To do this.

To be unashamed. About worshipping him. In our everyday lives. Well. Come back next week.

And we'll see. What. Abraham learned next. Which is. That the life of faith. Is actually really difficult. Let's be quiet. For a moment. And then I'll pray.

[22 : 01] Lord dear. Heavenly Father. We know that if it wasn't.

For your grace. Then we would be hopeless. And helpless. We would still be in bondage. To the kingdom of darkness. Cut off from you.

And cut off from your kingdom. And so our hearts. Are full of praise. And thankfulness. Because of the way. In which you've reached. Into our lives. Commanded us to change.

And pulled us. Out of the kingdom of darkness. And into the kingdom. Of the light of your son. Oh father. What amazing grace. You've shown us.

And we ask. That by the power of your spirit. You would help us. To be a people. Who. Like Abraham. Are guided by your word. And preoccupied. With worshipping you.

[22 : 57] In our everyday lives. So that those around us. May be blessed. So that they too. May come to hear. The call of your gospel. And that by hearing.

They might obey and believe. And so in Christ. Inherit all of the wondrous blessings. That you first promised. To Abraham. We pray all of these things.

In the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen. Amen.