

Whom do you trust?

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[0 : 00] I'd ask you to turn now in your Bibles, if you have them, to the book of Genesis, right at the beginning of the Scriptures. If you have one of our visitors' Bibles, our church Bibles, you'll find it on page 8.

Otherwise, you'll find it very near the beginning of whatever Bible you have. And we're going to read some verses from Genesis chapter 12, which is the beginning of the story of the call of God to a man out of the pagan nations of the world, a man called Abraham.

So we'll read Genesis 12, verses 1 to 9. Now the Lord said, or had said to Abraham, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

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 Abraham went as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him.

[1 : 23] Abraham was 75 years old when he departed from Haran. Abraham took Sarah, 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.

When they came to the land of Canaan, Abraham passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the Oak of Moreh. 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 Ai 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 towards the Negev.

Good evening, everyone. I'm glad to be with you tonight, and thank you, those who came this morning, for coming back.

[2 : 37] And we are especially excited for those of you who are coming to be a part of this church tonight. And if you are families or friends of those, we welcome you as well.

It's a big time tonight. Do you know, no matter where you go in the world, no matter where you go in the world, people use one picture of life.

We have it in common with every human being in the world. It's when we talk about life being like a journey. And you've heard it before, you've probably used it before, and we all know instinctively what it means.

It means it begins somewhere, presumably at birth, and then it ends somewhere, presumably at death. And I don't care what faith you are, what part of the world you come from, you know, as well as everyone else in the room, what that means.

Tonight, we have people from many different walks of life. Some of us are very early in that walk. Some of us are very late in that journey. Some of us have thought about it differently than others have thought about it.

[3 : 48] And some are confused. Some are very determined to go in particular ways. But I think we all would like to be able to say at the end of it all, we didn't fail.

I think there's something instinctive about that as well. Somehow, we would like to be able to look back over our lives and say, we made it.

Well, we just read a passage of Scripture, Genesis chapter 12, verses 1 to 3, where a very important man in world history was called by God to make a journey.

And this man, Abraham, father of Israel, father of Jesus, the spiritual father of every person in this room who is a follower of Jesus, this man's journey was not ordinary.

In fact, it was going to be a life of great challenge for him. But right at the very beginning, when God called him to take this journey, he said some things to Abram.

[4 : 54] Well, things to Abram that would challenge anyone. Things that would cause everyone who heard God say such a thing to go, well, exactly what am I to do with this thing called my life? How am I to live it? How can I be sure I will not fail? And we're going to just see three very simple things from this passage tonight.

The first thing is this. God says to Abram, Abram, you want to make this journey with me? You're going to have to figure out once and for all in whom you put your trust.

Listen again to verse 1 of Genesis chapter 12. Now, the Lord said to Abram, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land I will show you.

Who are you going to trust, Abram? A lot of times, I don't know where we get these ideas, maybe from children's movies and cartoons or from books that we read or look at. But a lot of times people have a false impression about Abram and the lifestyle he had at this point in his life.

[6 : 03] We think of him more or less like an ancient Bedouin. And you know what Bedouins are like. Nowadays, they live pretty much like people in those days lived.

Today, if you go to a Bedouin community, and I've been there, and some of you may have been there too, you know they have a big tent and they have a half dozen goats and two dozen children running around.

And in the back of the tent nowadays, they will have a Nissan pickup truck and a satellite dish. But most people think that's the way Abram was. And you know that in the Middle East, they travel, these Bedouins, because there's not much grass, there's not much water.

So you stay a place for a while, then you move to another, you move to another. Now, if you think that's the way Abram lived at this time in his life, then you can't understand what the big deal is. Because after all, God's calling Abram to leave and go somewhere else. Well, he was going to do that anyway in just a week or two. But when we read the rest of the story in the Bible, we find that Abram was not an ancient Bedouin.

[7 : 10] We discover, in fact, from things like how many servants he could buy, how many camels he had, things like that, even from the fact that he came from Ur of the Chaldeans. Ur of the Chaldeans was not a small place to come from.

And around 2000 BC, we know where this city was. It was one of among seven cities in the lower Tigris-Euphrates Valley and the plains there.

And in 2000 BC, they had running water in the homes of even relatively common people. If Jewish tradition is right that Abram's father, Terah, was an idol maker, that meant he had silver and gold. To put it bluntly, Abram was a wealthy man. He was established in the city of Ur of the Chaldeans. He was no Bedouin.

And so when God comes to him and says, I want you to leave your family, your kindred, your household, and go to the land I will show you, it was a grand challenge.

[8 : 16] God is calling Abram to let go of everything he had been taught from childhood and everything he had worked for every day of his life that would secure his life and give it meaning and give it purpose.

To let go of his extended family, which in that day like today, in that part of the world, means your business connections. Let go of these things. And go where?

To the land I will show you. It's as ambiguous as it sounds. That's what God is saying to Abram. Abram, what you've got to do is follow me. When we get there, I'll tell you you arrived.

And we find out only around verse 7 or 8 that God finally says to Abram, this is the place you finally arrived. Abram was one of many thousands of people who were migrating around this time toward the west, but he didn't know exactly where God wanted them to go until God said, this is it.

Now, we all know what's happening then in Abram's life. He's being challenged to decide in whom he's going to put his trust.

[9 : 31] The faith that Jesus teaches and preaches in his life, the faith that we believe in this church, in many ways it can be summed up as a matter of trust.

In whose hands are you going to entrust your life? Is it going to be the things that people around you trust? All those things that have secured your life and given it meaning and given it purpose and connection and significance?

Or is it going to be the God of heaven and earth? Abram was challenged. And so are we. Think about it this way. If you leave church tonight and I pull up in a car and I open the passenger door and I say, come on, get in with me, let's take a ride.

What's the first thing you're going to say to me? Where are we going? And if I say to you, oh, don't worry about that. Just get in the car. Let's take a ride. You'd be crazy to get in the car with me.

I mean, you don't know what preachers are like. You might end up in some lock over here. Who knows? Because you don't want to get in the car with someone you don't know.

[10:44] But right now, right now at this moment, if I were to pull into the driveway of a house in Jackson, Mississippi, United States of America, there are three children who would fight to get out of the car and run to my car and get in the front seat.

They wouldn't even think about asking their parents if they could ride with me. They wouldn't even think about asking me where we were going. Who are those children?

They're my grandchildren. So what's the difference between you and my grandchildren? That you would be crazy to get in the car with me, but they are delighted to get in the car with me.

You know what it is. They know me and you don't. Now, I don't mean they know me as a theory, that they know me as some high lofty principle that's up there some way, somehow, despite all the evidence of life.

I mean my grandchildren know that when there is trouble, someone is going to step up. When there is pain, someone is going to be there. They know that when things are falling apart, there's one man in this world they can count on, and it's Pops.

[12:00] They know it, and so they trust me. Do you ever have trouble trusting God that way? If he remains just a theory to you, if he remains just something that sort of catches all the things you can't explain, if you don't have an enriching personal experience of God in your life day by day, then no wonder you have a hard time letting go of the things of this world and trusting him.

To trust God, you have to find ways to risk. Find ways for him to show up in your life.

Find ways for him to fix things in your experience. If you'll just do it in small ways, you don't have to jump off a cliff, just little steps of faith and trust in him.

You'll discover, if you're a follower of Jesus, that he will show up in your life, and your ability to trust him will grow and grow and grow.

You know, there was one person in this world who trusted the Father in heaven perfectly.

[13:13] His name was Jesus, and he trusted him so well that he gave up all things in order to have the protection and the care and the approval of God the Father.

Let that be your life. Let it begin that way today. But that wasn't all that God said to Abram.

Sure, trust me, Abram, you've got to determine that. But there's another thing that is expressed in this passage that is ever so important for all of us, no matter where you are in life. Abram, you need to get your expectations straightened out.

What can you expect to have in this life? Listen to what happens in Genesis chapter 12, beginning in verse 2. And I, God, will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing.

Now, frankly, when I hear that verse, that sounds like a good deal to me. Abram's told if he'll just leave Ur the Chaldeans down there in Babylon and take a little trip and go to the place that God tells him, then everything's coming up roses.

[14:30] Everything's wonderful. If he was anything like you and me, that's exactly what he was thinking too. God says to him, I will make you into a great nation.

Great. I'll leave Ur the Chaldeans. I'll become this huge nation. I like that idea. I'll bless you, which in those days basically meant I'll make you rich. Yeah, I like that. And I'll make your name great.

Yeah, you know, I had a reputation back there in Babylon, but I would like an even greater name than that. Sounded really good, I'm sure, to Abram. And again, if he was anything like you and me, he thought all he had to do was just take this trip, and God would pour out those blessings on him. But we find out something about Abram's life. All through his life, Abram had to wait and wait and wait for these blessings to be given to him.

God says, I'm going to make you a great nation. Well, how many heirs did Abram, legitimate heirs, did Abram ever have? The answer is one, and he didn't get that for a long, long time.

[15:36] And when God finally gave him an heir, God said, give him back. And Abram was willing to do that. Oh, God's going to bless me and make me rich.

He's going to make my name great. Well, how much real estate did Abram own in his entire life? The answer is one grave site that he had to buy from a Hittite.

And there he buried his wife, then he was buried later, and a generation or two were buried after that. That's all he ever owned. If you own a home tonight, you own more real estate than Abram ever owned.

And this is the man that God promises he will bless beyond measure? How can this be? Well, one of the things that Abram had to learn his entire life was to get his expectations straight about what kinds of blessings would come into his life.

How did Abram do it? How did he manage to remain faithful to God through his journey of life when God was not just pouring out blessings after blessings after blessings, when he had to wait, when he had to endure, when he had to suffer the sadness of life and the disappointments of life?

[16:53] Well, the book of Hebrews in the New Testament tells us exactly how he did this. He took his eyes off of the things here. He took his hopes out of this world, and he set his eyes on the world to come.

He set his eyes on what he would receive in the celestial city, the book of Hebrews tells us. The new Jerusalem that will one day come down out of heaven onto a new earth, and that will be his inheritance in that day.

Ask yourself this question. Have you figured out yet that life, this side of life, is just not going to satisfy you?

Maybe some of you are so young that you actually think that the things you get in this world, the possessions you have, the friendships you have, relationships, those kinds of things, that they're going to last a long, long, long, long time.

Let me tell you something. When you get to be my age or older, you realize that if something is with you your entire life, it goes like that. I live in Orlando, Florida.

[18:13] Mickey Mouse is my neighbor. I know Mickey Mouse. And as you probably know, it's very warm there. But just a few Christmases ago, it actually got cold enough that it snowed.

I know because around 2 a.m. in the morning, I and my neighbors all came out of our house to see the snow. We turned our headlights on on the cars so we could see the snow coming down. There it was.

And I just loved it because I come from north and wasn't born and raised in Florida. So I put out my hand. I was going to make a little snowball and throw it at my neighbor. That's all I wanted to do.

Just hold the snow.

But those snowflakes were so fragile that when I put my hand out like this, the heat of my hand melted the flakes before they even touched my hand.

All those things you're working for. All those things you hope to get. All those relationships you think are going to be so satisfying.

[19:14] All those dreams you have for this world. They are snowflakes that melt before they even touch your hand. Have you seen it yet? Have you known it yet?

If ever there were a person who walked on this planet who deserved to have God bless him every single day of his life so much that no one could possibly imagine how much blessing he received, it would have to be Jesus, the one who obeyed the Father so perfectly.

But Jesus himself, how much real estate did he have? How much money did he have in his pocket? How many faithful friends did he have?

Well, how did he make it? How was he able to make it all the way to the end in faithfulness to God when he received so very little? Well, the book of Hebrews in the New Testament tells us the same about him as it did Abram.

It said Jesus endured it all, even death on the cross for sinners, by setting his eyes on the glory of the world to come. One of the worst things that American Christians have propagated in this world is a false teaching, seriously false teaching, that we often call prosperity theology or the prosperity gospel.

[20:40] Now, if you don't know what that is, just turn on Christian television, watch for five minutes, you'll know what it is. Basically, prosperity theology says this, if you will just have faith, if you'll just have enough faith in Christ, then he'll make you rich.

He'll give you that promotion. He'll make your spouse really look good again. Your children will be little angels. You'll have a happy life if you just have enough faith. Now, we hear that and we say,

well, that's the silliest thing I've ever heard in my life.

And it is, frankly, the silliest thing that could possibly be said. But, you know, people like you and me, we have our own form of prosperity Christianity. Oh, don't misunderstand me.

We're not going to talk about having faith. No, no, we're not going to do that. But this is what we will talk about. If you just learn the Bible and obey the Bible, then God will bless you.

God will make things go well for you. God will open up the doors of opportunity. Just read the Bible and obey it and all these good things will be coming your way. You don't think we believe that?

[21 : 46] Well, then let me ask you this question. What do churches do when they want to encourage their congregations to give more money to the church?

Often they do this. They'll bring people up onto the stage to give testimony. And you know how it goes. You've probably heard these things yourself. The man comes up and he says, well, for the last 20 years, I never tithed.

Not one single year did I tithe. But last year I decided I was going to tithe. And I made more money this year than I've ever made. Everybody goes, yeah, great. I can do that.

10% of my money. Oh, and I get rich off of that? I'm going for it. I mean, have you ever heard a church bring someone up on the stage who said, for the last 25 years, I've never tithed my income to the church.

But this year I decided I was going to do it. And my house went into foreclosure. I lost my job. And I became very, very sick. You ever heard that?

[22 : 45] Of course not. Because we just don't want to face the reality that God's people in every generation have obeyed the truth of Scripture and have suffered for it.

So when you see things going good or going badly in your life, don't think of this as the obvious blessing or curse of God in your life. Bad things, suffering comes from obedience for you and me, just like it did for Jesus.

But when God speaks to Abram, he says to him, yes, you're going to have to trust me, me only.

Yes, you're going to have to get your expectations in life straight. But he also says this to Abram.

Abram, you need to understand why I've chosen you and why I am giving you so much these days for you.

Listen to what he says at the end of verse 2. Why was all this to be true? So that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonors you, I will curse.

[23 : 53] And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Why did God bless Abram? The one thing that's very clear in this passage is that it was not for Abram's sake.

Why did God make Abram his man, the father of the faithful for all generations to come? It's clear in this passage that it was not for Abram. It was so that Abram would be a blessing to the peoples and the nations of the world, all the families of the earth.

And as followers of Jesus, we know the son of Abraham, Jesus, who fulfills this promise. Because it is Jesus, that great son of Abraham, who opened the good news of Jesus to every nation, to every tribe, to every people.

It is Jesus who spread the blessings of God to Abram, to the entire world. And that is why God chose you as well. You know, very often, and it's so easy to do this, we think that God blesses us because he likes us so much, wants us to be happy, wants us to have our ways.

But the reality is whatever blessing God has given you, he has given it for the sake of others. The Tron has been blessed so much, you could not possibly believe it.

[25 : 26] But it's not for you. It's for Glasgow. It's for the people back in your neighborhoods. It's for the people you meet at work. It's for the people you know at school.

It's for other people that God has given you this church, with this pastor, with this fellowship, with this encouragement, with this Bible teaching. That blessing is for someone else.

And it is for you to pass it to them. I have a friend who called me up one time on the phone.

He said, Rich, I have something I want to tell you, but you have to promise to keep it a secret.

That's the last thing a pastor wants to hear. Because you know what's coming next. Some deep, dark sin that this man has.

Okay. So I said, okay, go ahead and tell me what's going on. And he heard that tone of my voice.

And he said, oh, no, no, no, no. It's not bad. It's good. It's really good. Oh, really? Good news? Well, then tell me.

[26 : 23] He said, well, I have to tell you, because if I tell anybody else, they're going to think I'm proud, but you'll understand. I said, okay, then tell me. His daughter had just celebrated her 16th birthday.

Now, you need to understand something about this family. This is a very special family, and they live in a socioeconomic bracket where every child who turns 16 has an expectation of what he or she is going to get, and it's always met.

Here's what they get on their 16th birthday. You won't believe it. A brand new European sports car. Ooh. Like my family, you know. Like your family, right? Well, understand that that's the kind of family we're talking about.

And this young lady, 16 years old, she knew that's what was going to happen on her birthday morning, so she goes out to the garage. There it is, big bow in the car. She rips it off, gives her dad and mama a hug, and drives off.

And he said, Rich, you know what's happened? For the last six weeks, she has never made it home for dinner on time one time. Not once has she made it home for dinner. And he says, I was holding my tongue.

[27 : 26] I was trying not to say anything, hoping she'd turn around and get the idea that that's not the way to show me gratitude, but she never seemed to get it, so I sat her down one night and said, Girl, where have you been?

You've not been here one night on time for dinner. Where have you been? Is this the way you show me gratitude for this car? I'm going to take it away from you. And she says to her, Daddy, Daddy, I can't tell you where I've been.

That's the wrong thing to say. Can't tell me where I've been. You're going to tell me where you've been. So finally she says, okay. And he says, Rich, you would not believe where she has been. Every day after school, she has gotten into her car. She has gone to the nursing homes, the homes where people who are old and sick and need help are living.

Four of them around her nursing home, around her high school. And she has taken orders from what they want from the store and she's gone to get them every day for the last six weeks. And that's why she never made it back to home for dinner on time.

[28 : 38] That 16-year-old understands something that you and I just don't quite get. God gives us some magnificent blessing in life and we think it's for us.

But the reality is, it's for the world that is lost and dying all around us. Aren't you glad that people in the past felt that way?

Aren't you glad that followers of Jesus, felt that way in the past so that you heard the good news of Christ? You realize this church would not be here if there hadn't have been someone who believed that that's what blessings are for, is to give it to others.

It's gone on for generation after generation and generation for followers of Jesus. And I fear, I fear that our generation may be the first one that says no to that call.

No, the blessings are for us. We're going to hold on to them. We're going to treasure them rather than give them away. I fear that that's going to be the end of us.

[29 : 51] Thanks be to God that Jesus didn't feel that way. Thanks be to God that our forebears did not feel that way.

Thanks be to God that someone took their blessings and gave it to you. So now, the rubber begins to meet the road now.

You've got this journey you're taking, this thing called your life. Into whose hands are you going to put it? Whom are you going to trust?

Will it be all the things you work so hard for or will it be Jesus, the only one who can really be trusted? And what do you hope to get out of life? Do you understand that this life passes in the blink of an eye and that one day you will actually be staring into eternity?

That one day you will have to give an account for your life? Is that your priority as you live right now? And why is it then, dear Christian, that God has given the gift of the good news of Jesus to you?

[31 : 11] That he has given you this church? That he has given you your homes and your families and your friends? Why has he done all of this? It's so that you and I may be equipped to bring the good news of Jesus to the whole world.

Let's pray together. Our Lord Jesus, we bless you and honor you that you did not hold back in any of these areas, that you trusted the Father, that you longed for the day of the new world, and that you spent your life blessing others with the blessings God had given you.

We pray now that you will grant that grace to us. Holy Spirit, empower us, enliven us, because we simply cannot do these things on our own.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Well, we're going to sing now in response to what we've heard.

Number 632, 632. 2433,