

Restoration Road Church

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Genesis 12: 10-20

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After taking a 5 week break from the book of Genesis with a short series on the Holy Spirit, we got back into it last week with a sermon on Abram. Abraham, as his name later becomes is a central figure in the bible. He is the recognized father of faith for Christianity because he is the one who God chose to give the promise that through his seed a child would be born who would be a blessing to all the families of the earth. Today, we will pick up the story of Abram when God brings to him a test of his faith in the form of a famine.

¹⁰ Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. ¹¹ When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, "I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance, ¹² and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me, but they will let you live. ¹³ Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake." ¹⁴ When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. ¹⁵ And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. ¹⁶ And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels.

¹⁷ But the Lord afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. ¹⁸ So Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? ¹⁹ Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife; take her, and go." ²⁰ And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him, and they sent him away with his wife and all that he had.

Last week we learned of the call of Abram by God to leave his homeland and to travel to another land that God would show him. We learned of his response of

faith which led to his obedience. The first part of this 12th chapter also contains in it great promise of blessings that God made to Abram. These were promises of his own coming blessedness as well as promises that through him and his descendants all the families of the earth would be blessed. So after arriving in Canaan he built an alter to worship the Lord and after moving around the land for a while he built a second alter in a different place to worship the Lord. The building of these alters shows us that wherever Abram traveled there in that land he was steadily worshipping the Lord. So far we have only seen the strength of Abram's faith.

Now we read of a famine that comes upon the land where he now lives. Abram's faith is now tested, and we see that his faith is not as mature and strong as it seemed. Abram's response to the famine is to go down to Egypt. But notice that nowhere in the text do we read that the Lord told him to go there. Abram should have trusted in the God who called him to this land to provide for him but for some reason he decides to turn toward the resources of this world during his time of need rather than trusting in God to provide for him and his family. Biblically, going down to Egypt as Abram does symbolizes a journey away from faith and trust in God, and joining forces with the world in an attempt to overcome hardship and difficulty. Isaiah 31:1 reads:

**Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help
and rely on horses,
who trust in chariots because they are many
and in horsemen because they are very strong,
but do not look to the Holy One of Israel
or consult the Lord!**

To be fair to Abram we must point out that he had been tested quite a lot even before the famine came.

1. First of all, his wife Sarai was barren. This would have been difficult enough, even before God made a promise that they would have a son, but as time went on this surely was an area where he could have easily doubted the promise.
2. He left his home and community without being told where he would end up. As Sam mentioned last week, this took a lot of faith.

3. He was leaving his people behind. A community of family and friends built over 70 plus years of life is large and friendships were undoubtedly deep.
4. Not long before leaving, his father Terah died. Yes, he was over 200 years old, but they had presumably lived in community together for years.
5. When he arrived in Canaan, he found no home there and the land was inhabited by Canaanites who were worse idolaters than the pagans in his own country.
6. As if all of this isn't bad enough, famine comes to the land soon after he arrives.

It's not hard to understand the doubts and the fears that began to creep into the mind and then the heart of Abram. The circumstances of his life were beginning to bring on a lot of heat and it was causing distraction from true devotion to God. His leaving Canaan signifies his weakening trust and worship of God leaving him vulnerable to further temptation. Having failed to trust in God as Provider, he now begins to doubt in God as Protector.

We know this because before entering Egypt, he makes a deal with Sarai:

"I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance, ¹² and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me, but they will let you live. ¹³ Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake."

Abram's lack of faith and trust in God as provider during the famine leads him to make this fateful decision to lie about Sarai being his sister. Believing that this would preserve his life and keep his family safe for the duration of the famine, he resorts to what at best is only a half truth, Sarai being his half-sister. But sin has a way of leading us into places we never intended to go and when they get to Egypt and explain to the Egyptians that Sarai is his sister and not his wife, Sarai is taken by the princes to Pharaoh himself to be his wife. Now Abram is alone and by himself completely powerless to do anything about it. Such is the pathway of sin; there are always resulting consequences that we did not predict or plan for.

But God is faithful in keeping the promise he made Abram and their separation is only to be temporary. God intervenes for the sake of his promise to Abram and the purity and honor of Sarai. Through a series of plagues, God communicates to Pharaoh that Sarai is actually Abram's wife and returns her to Abram.

I'm struck by several truths from this passage:

1. **The bible doesn't whitewash the life of Abram.** And not just Abram, but Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Solomon, etc., etc.... As much as we see the evidence of faith and obedience in their lives, we are also given clear and sometimes shocking portrayals of their unfaithfulness, disobedience, lying, adultery, murder, lust and greed. It seems that as God inspired his word to be written, he plainly desired that the lives of these biblical "heroes" would be honestly shown. I believe that this demonstrates on the one hand that the bible is truthful and trustworthy and on the other that the main character of this passage is not Abram, but rather God himself. The whole bible, from the account of creation in the beginning of Genesis to the presentation of the New Jerusalem at the end of Revelation is about Him and about how He brought about salvation to a lost and dying world through sinful persons such as Abram, culminating in the birth, life, death and resurrection of His Perfect Son Jesus Christ, who was the fulfillment of the promise God gave Abram when he said that through him all the families of the earth would be blessed.
2. **God's promises to Abram did not depend on his faithfulness, but on God's.** Clearly, if the promises depended on Abram's holy living this would have been the end of Abram's part in God's story of redemption. Abram would not have seen Sarai again as she would have become one of Pharaoh's wives and consequently there would have been no child born between them. But because God is a promise keeper he delivers Abram from his desperate situation by causing plagues to fall upon Pharaoh and his household. The NIV translation actually says that God inflicted diseases on Pharaoh and his household. The text doesn't say exactly what these plagues or diseases were or how Pharaoh knew they were because he had taken Sarai to be his wife. Perhaps she was the only one spared the diseases in the entire household, or possibly the plagues kept him from physically taking her as his wife, but regardless, at this point he returns her to Abram and scolds him for his lie. This is proof that God's promises do not depend on perfect faithfulness from those who have responded to the call of God by faith.

3. **Sin always has consequences.** Surely Abram didn't know that his plan to protect himself from the Egyptians would backfire to the point that Sarai would be taken away from him. He believed their little lie would serve to keep him safe until such a time when the famine would be over and they could return to Canaan. But I'm sure that you have experienced along with me that when we choose to sin, the results are rarely as we planned them to be. Temptation always promises instantaneous gratification, but what follows is usually not so gratifying. Consider for a moment the area of sexual temptation. Whether it's viewing inappropriate material on the internet to fooling around with someone not married to you, you will not escape the consequences your sin will bring into your life and the lives of others. From experiencing guilt and shame to losing your wife and family and everything in between, the consequences of sexual sins are real. I know that many young men in particular believe that fooling around with your girlfriend before your married is not harming anyone but it's a lie. You are actually harming her by leading her away from Christ and taking from her that which rightfully only belongs to her future husband. Even if you're planning to be married and you end up being married to one another she may well resent you for not protecting her purity from your own sinful desires.

I'm sure that Abram was overjoyed when Sarai was returned to him but the joy of having Sarai back as his wife had to be tempered by the humiliation of getting rebuked and scolded by Pharaoh:

.¹⁸ So Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? ¹⁹ Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife; take her, and go." ²⁰ And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him, and they sent him away with his wife and all that he had.

I'm sure that hitting the road never felt so good to Abram but I imagine Sarai had a few words for Abram herself. I can only imagine the conversations between Abram and Sarai as they processed what they had just been through; not to mention the conversations that Abram had with God himself. Plenty of time to work things out with his wife and his God.

Notice how Abram received great wealth from Pharaoh for Sarai. He received enormous herds of animals along with male and female servants as payment or as a dowry for Sarai. When the Egyptian ruler sends him back to Canaan, he is allowed to keep his ill-gotten wealth. Even though it was given to him under false pretenses, God allows him to keep it. It becomes partly a fulfillment of the promise God made to him that he would be blessed. As we will see next week however in chapter 13, having great possessions brings with it its own complications and struggles.

So what do we take away from all of this? Primarily what I learn from this text and what I desire to impart to you this morning is this that God is worthy to be trusted **all the time**. There is no circumstance in this life that is beyond his ability to carry you through. Proverbs 3: 5-6 tells us: **Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.** One great hindrance to our doing this is when we are distracted from worshipping God by the cares and concerns of this world. One of the wonderful truths about God is that when we fail in our devotion to him, he uses that failure to build our faith and our trust in him so that we will be stronger the next time we are tested. This becomes very evident in the life of Abraham as we will see in the coming chapters. Listen to how the Apostle Peter describes these trials, ⁶**In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials,** ⁷**so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Pet 1:6-7).**

I personally have loved meditating on the lyrics of the popular Christian song called Trust in You:

When You don't move the mountains I'm needing You to move
When You don't part the waters I wish I could walk through
When You don't give the answers as I cry out to You
I will trust, I will trust, I will trust in You!

Today is a day of great significance to me. Not only is it my beloved wife's birthday, (I won't say how old she is today) but it's also the anniversary of another important date in my life. 18 years ago today, May 22, 1998, Cheryl and I left the

only church community we had ever known to become part of another that we didn't know. Now I know that last week Sam said that you shouldn't always claim that God is calling you elsewhere when you leave one church for another, and I agree with that, but believe me this was a life changing event that was only possible because God in his grace was calling us out. And though I would never compare the significance of Abram's call to my own, there was at one similarity; I had no idea where I was going. In order for you to understand how radical this decision was for me and my family at the time, let me tell you a little about this little sect that we were both born and raised in. And believe me, anything I say about this particular church does not characterize the members of it. They are people just like the rest of us, most of my family as well as Cheryl's are still very much a part of it. We love them very much. Furthermore, I have many good memories of this community and can honestly say that in many ways it is very comfortable to belong there. You know virtually everyone, even the ones who are in other states such as Minnesota or Arizona where a few of these churches exist. The sense of community is incredibly strong. It's like one big family that stretches around various states and Canada and throughout Finland and parts of Sweden. They have big summer services in the US and in Finland. The 4-day festival in Finland attracts around 80000 people who gather together for a long weekend on several hundred acres of leased farm land around a huge white service tent that holds several thousand people. People bring travel trailers and tents and lots and lots of children. Friends and acquaintances who haven't seen each other the past year catch up with each other and meet each other's children. The fellowship is so deep and relationships so many that people sleep very few hours during this time especially since the sun never sets this on this mid-summer weekend in Finland. I could go on and on about the beauty and blessedness in being part of that group. Membership there is as much cultural as it is religious.

But I need to tell you why we left. For 6 years I served as one of their pastors. I read the bible. I read sermons and books by Martin Luther. I even listened to Christian radio which is highly discouraged and I began to see that there were severe doctrinal and theological errors in the teachings of this church. Let me give you a sample:

1. They taught that they were the only true church. Anyone who claimed to be a Christian outside of their fellowship was a false Christian. Anyone who left their fellowship for another church was considered apostate.
2. They taught you cannot have forgiveness from God directly. You had to ask another “believer” for forgiveness and they would proclaim that your sins are forgiven in Jesus name and blood.
3. Almost everything was a sin including but not limited to: TV, movies, worldly music, dancing, any form of birth control or family planning, alcohol, make up, earrings, tattoos, finger nail polish, attending sporting events, and attending PEP assemblies at school, just to name a few.
4. All socializing was to be done with other believers. Spending too much time with unbelievers was highly discouraged.
5. God’s promises depended on your continual faithfulness. If you sinned and didn’t ask another believer for forgiveness for that sin, it remained unforgiven. Too many unforgiven sins and your faith would extinguish and your salvation gone.
6. In summary, this small, unknown denomination was **THE** Kingdom of God. It was the only sphere within which the Holy Spirit works. If during the course of your life you never came into contact with one of these true believers and heard from him or her the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins in the name and blood of Jesus, you have zero hope of salvation. No amount of faith in Christ, believing in his father who sent him would benefit you. No amount of brokenness and contrition over your sins and crying out to God for forgiveness would impart to any grace to cover your sins.

This is the faith that both Cheryl and I were raised on. I was convinced that it was the only true faith and only path to heaven. I considered myself extremely blessed and fortunate to have been born into a believing family that belonged to the only right church.

But then, as I read and studied the word of God, I began to see a new and different reality. I began to see the many promises that are made in the New Testament that we are saved by faith alone. Such as Eph. 2: 8-9 which says: **⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.** I began to have doubts about their teaching of exclusivity. The more I read, the more I began to

consider the idea that maybe, just maybe some others outside our group were also true believers. Eventually, I expressed my doubts to Cheryl and it scared me so much that I vowed to never listen to the bible answer man or R.C. Sproul or John MacArthur again. That lasted about two weeks. Eventually, I began to realize more and more of the errors and this made it real difficult because as I would preach from time to time there were some who were becoming uncomfortable with what I was preaching.

Eventually, on a day exactly 18 years ago I was summoned to a meeting with the other pastors who expressed concern about what I was teaching. It was then that I declared to them that I no longer believed as they did and was going to leave.

So to be clear, I did not hear God audibly speak to me and tell me to leave. But I believe with all my heart that through his word and through his Holy Spirit, he called me out to experience the fullness and richness of the gospel with others who also got it. It was a radical change in our lives because it necessarily changed our relationships with hundreds of people that were very dear to us, including our own parents and siblings. In their minds and hearts they believed that we had become shipwrecked in faith and were no longer fellow believers. We were in their minds on our way to hell.

That is why I believe it was God who called us out. There is no other way we would have left the family that we loved and that loved us in return. We were called by the precious words of Jesus who promised us this: ²⁴ **Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.** (John 5:24) We were also called by God through the words of his Apostle Paul: ⁹ **because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.** ¹⁰ **For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.** (Rom. 10: 9-10) We were encouraged to put Him even before our own families by the words of Jesus himself when he said: ³⁶ **And a person's enemies will be those of his own household.** ³⁷ **Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.** ³⁸ **And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.** (Matt. 10:36-38) Essentially, as I received the promises of God revealed to us in

his word, I knew that he would care for us along the way, every step of the way. And he has. He has been completely faithful to his promises each and every day. He did not leave us as orphans, but adopted us into his blessed family. We soon found ourselves at a reformed Presbyterian church where the pastor met with us every week for over a year, teaching us the foundational truths of the Christian faith.

The community that we had to leave behind has been replaced tenfold. The ministry I once had as a pastor was returned 10 years ago with the planting of Damascus Road Church in Marysville. I'm blessed to have worked alongside Pastor Sam these last ten years. Together, we have seen God do amazing work in the lives of sinners. That doesn't mean that everything has been easy. No, God has tested us along the way as well; I'm sure Sam will attest to that. Many times I have failed the test, but God, in his faithfulness and grace always rescues me, restores me, strengthens and grows me. Because I know the promise maker is a promise keeper, I don't lose hope. I press on knowing that the one who began a good work in me is faithful to bring it to completion in the day of Jesus Christ.

In closing, I want to encourage those of you who are languishing in spiritual Egypt. You who have turned to manmade solutions and worldly wisdom to problems that God desires to fix if only you would turn to him in faith. God delights in your faithful trust in Him even when times are hard and the way seems really difficult. It is never too late for you to turn back to him in repentance and faith. God will use even your times of unfaithfulness and sin to bring you to greater maturity in the faith, even as he did to Abram, even as He has to so many since. If you have never put your faith in the finished work of Christ, if you've never trusted him with your life and with your eternity, do not hesitate a moment longer. Make this day, May 22, 2016 a monument in your life as well.

Amen