

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ABRAHAM

Week One: Security and the Call of God

Genesis 11:27-12:9

Good morning Lake Wylie. If you have a copy of God's Word begin turning to Genesis 11. If you would like to use a Bible found in the pew rack in front of you the passage today is found on page 8.

27 Now these are the generations of Terah. Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran fathered Lot. 28 Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his kindred, in Ur of the Chaldeans. 29 And Abram and Nahor took wives. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and Iscah. 30 Now Sarai was barren; she had no child.

31 Terah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife, and they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan, but when they came to Haran, they settled there. 32 The days of Terah were 205 years, and Terah died in Haran.

12:1 Now 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. 2 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. 3 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."

4 So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. 5 And Abram 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. When they came to the land of Canaan, 6 Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. 7 Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. 8 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. 9 And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb.

This morning we're starting a 5 week series we're calling The Gospel According to Abraham. If you're new to the Bible, Abraham is the biggest character in the Old Testament. He's monumental.

Three major world religions: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam claim Abraham as a father of their faith. This means that the majority of the world population trace their beliefs back through Abraham.

By the way, you see in the passage the name Abram. Later God renames him Abraham. Abram means "father." Abraham means "father of many". So Abram, "daddy." Abraham, "Big daddy."

And when you read the life of Abraham in the Old Testament, you find that Abraham stood out from the crowd. In a world of sameness, he was different.

Life didn't happen to Abraham—he happened to life. Just consider:

We take monotheism for granted today, but Abraham lived in a time when everyone was a polytheist—and he threw away his idols and worshiped the one true God.

Abraham lived in a time when you grew up, lived, worked, married, died, and were buried in the same city—and Abraham threw caution to the wind and set out from his homeland.

Now where do you get that kind of confidence? How can you have that kind of security—to swim so firmly against the stream. How can you have a security that allows you to happen to life, instead of life happening to you?

This passage shows us three sources of that kind of security, but as I wrote the sermon the first source took up too much space so you only get two today. Sorry. I'll tell you the third after the service.

1. SECURITY IS FOUND IN THE CALL OF GOD. (v. 12.1)
2. SECURITY IS FOUND THE GOD WHO PROMISES (11.30)

1. SECURITY IS FOUND IN THE CALL OF GOD (v. 12.1)

If you look back up in 12.1 you see the call of God on Abraham:

Now 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."

There are two aspects to note in the call of God:

First, see that the call of God is a personal call. It's a call that Abraham must personally respond to. God gives a direct, personal call. "Abraham, you have to hear my voice and you have to make a personal response to me."

And that's exactly what it means to be a Christian. To know God means to hear God's call and personally respond to him.

My daughter Olivia is 4 years old. And I'm in the thick of teaching her Bible stories and doctrine. We use this little tool at the dinner table called a catechism. Basically, it's a series of questions and answers.

So I'll ask, "Olivia, what is our only hope in life and death?" She will respond, "That we are not our own but belong to God."

"Olivia, what is God?" "God is the creator of everyone and everything."

And so on and so forth. Now, my hope is that Olivia learns the right answers to Biblical questions, and that she treasures the Scriptures. She says prayers at the dinner table, and she attends this church.

But I am also teaching Olivia that it isn't enough to know answers, and memorize the Bible, and say prayers.

I tell her that one day God is going to call her name, and it will be her responsibility to hear and personally respond to his voice.

And what is the response? What does God personally call Abraham to do?

This is the second aspect of the call of God.

The response that God calls from Abraham is unconditional surrender.

Did you notice that in verse 1?

Now 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."

Literally, God says, "Abram, get out." It's an unconditional call of surrender to God.

Now—before I get into this let me show you how we normally look for security:

Path #1 Many secular people think, "Security comes when I decide my life's meaning and I live true to it." I'll forge my destiny. I'm the captain of my ship. As long as I'm not hurting anyone I'll decide who I am, and as I live true to me, I'll be secure.

Path #2 Many religious people think, "Security comes when God reveals his plan for my life." They call this knowing God's will.

But Abraham's life challenges both paths to security. **Abraham gains a security that thrusts him out into the unknown, something no one would have done back then.** Yet, unlike the secularist, he isn't in control. He isn't deciding what makes him significant. And unlike the religious view, God hasn't given him a detailed plan. Abraham has no clue where he is going.

And here's what this tells us that our security in life doesn't come from living true to our self-made significance. Neither does security come from knowing God's detailed plan for our lives.

Here's why we can't create our own security—it can't come from us. At the end of his life Sydney Pollack had made all of these wonderful movies and his health was failing so his family was begging him to slow down and stop working.

And even though the process of making movies was grueling and wearing him down he wouldn't stop and here's what he said,

"Every time I complete a picture, I've earned my stay for another year or so." In essence, "I'm a movie maker, and as long as I'm true to that I'll have security." But he didn't.

So you can't create your own security. But, the view that if God would just show me all the detailed plan of my life—if I could see all of his will for me—then I'd be secure—that's just as much an illusion.

And the reason is because God rarely, if ever shares a detailed plan with anyone.

Look at what he tells Abraham: "Get out!"

He says, "Leave your homeland." This means you leave behind your cultural identity. "Leave your family." This mean you've stepped outside of the security of your connections. "Leave your father's house." Leave behind your inheritance.

And Abraham says, “Ok, where am I going?” God says, “I’ll tell you later, Abraham.”

The call of God is unconditional. I know this sounds absurd—but listen to me—this passage is showing you that as long as you are asking God for answers— he’s not really in control. You aren’t really responding to the call.

This isn’t the only time this happens to Abraham. If you read his entire story you’ll see God do this to Abraham three times:

“Abraham, get out!”

“Where am I going?”

God says, "Don't worry. I'll tell you later-- just go."

“Abraham, you're going to have a son.”

“How?”

“Don't worry about that-- just trust.”

“Abraham, take the son through whom all the promises will be fulfilled, go up to the mountain and sacrifice him to me.”

“Why?”

“Abraham, trust me and start climbing.”

John Gerstner used to tell the story of an American woman in the 1930’s who at the age of 15 had accepted Christ and committed her entire life to going to the mission field in Asia.

As she grew and went through high school many of her friends who had made similar commitments fell off, but she stuck to it. She kept her resolve. She did her research. She went to the

missionary agencies. She learned how difficult and dangerous it was. She knew missionaries in the 30’s were being killed. But she still pursued.

She wanted to go. So, the missionary agency told her there were two things she needed. You must get training. Cross cultural training, theology, and Bible. Oh, and one other thing. By the way—you gotta be married, because they were not sending single women as missionaries to Asia. It wasn’t safe, and there were other cultural reasons. So, they said you’re going to have to get married.

So, one night she sat down at the end of high school and she said, “Lord I take my hands off my life, and I give you everything. I don’t want a safe life. I don’t want a comfortable life. Everybody else is getting ready for all sorts of fun—but I’m going to go. I’ll do all the training, I’ll take the classes. There’s just only one thing I need from you. I need a husband.

She went to a Bible college, and she knew that by going there it wasn’t very good preparation for other things that she could have done—but she knew what she wanted to do so she took Bible, and theology, and cross-cultural missions training.

When she got done with Bible college she went to a mission training grad school, she applied herself, she didn’t waiver, she studied.

At the end of Bible college: no husband. No boyfriend. No prospects.

She went into her two years of graduate school and as the years went by no husband. No boyfriend. No prospects.

And on the night before she was about to graduate, no husband, no boyfriend, no prospects, Dr. Gerstner said she says, “That night I sat in my dorm room an angry young woman.” She said, “God how can you do this to me? I have nothing else I can do. I have nowhere else to go. I’ve put everything into this. I have no other options. I committed my whole life to this. I took my hands off of my life I gave my life to you, and I only asked you for one thing! How can you do this to me?”

And she wrestled and wept. And, that night she suddenly realized something. She suddenly realized that she had been kidding herself.

She suddenly realized she wasn’t miserable because she had taken her hands off of her life. She was miserable because she never had.

She realized that she had developed her own idea of personal security. She had been telling God was she was going to do, and what she expected in return.

She was saying, “I’ll response to your call, but here are my conditions.”

God has called some of you, who have not come to Christ, and you’re conditioning the call.

I will come IF I can still maintain control of my career.

I will come IF I can keep my old friends, and go to my old places.

I will come IF I can still sleep with my girlfriend even though I know God has said not to.

I will come IF I get to choose where I live.

I will come IF...

If you are saying, "I'll come if..." whatever is on the other side of the if is what you are really serving. You are conditioning the call. You're qualifying the call. You're still in the driver seat.

God is calling some of you to take the gospel to your neighbors, and to your family and you’re conditioning the call. I’ll tell my neighbors about you, God, but I don’t want to look weird.

When John Wesley, one of the Oxford founders of the Methodist movement held services to help realign the hearts of Christians who had begun to make claims on God, and condition God’s call, and try to work for the blessings of God he would have them all recite this prayer:

Lord,

I am no longer my own, but yours.

Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will;

let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you,

exalted for you, or brought low for you;

let me be full,

let me be empty,

let me have all things,

let me have nothing:
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things
to your pleasure and disposal.
And now, glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine and I am yours. So be it.
And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven.
Amen.

You see, Wesley had understood something of the security of Abraham—and how it comes through responding to the unconditional call of God. “Let me be employed for you—or let me be laid aside for you.”

Have you responded to the radical call of God?

2. SECURITY IS FOUND IN THE GOD WHO PROMISES (12:1-3; 11:30)

I know you’re probably thinking, “Ok... I hear you. Abraham. Get Out.

I see that I have to make a personal response to God. I see that my response can’t be conditioned by my work, or my friends, or my family, or my hopes for the future...if I choose to follow his call I have to completely take my hands off my life. But how in the world can I bring that into my life? Practically speaking, how could I possibly do that? I don’t think I could bring myself to that level of surrender.”

And here’s the answer. At the beginning of chapter 12 God gives Abraham these promises: he’s going to make Abraham into a nation. God will bless the world through Abraham’s offspring.

Everything is going to happen through Abraham’s offspring. But there’s one problem. Verse 30 says this:

30 Now Sarai was barren; she had no child.

Do you see what is happening? God has made a promise to make Abraham a great nation—but Sarah was barren. Through this great nation, the world will be blessed—but Abraham and Sarah can’t have children. Sarah is barren. Abraham is old.

And that meant the son was going to have to be a miraculous gift of God’s grace. God is essentially saying, “Abraham, I’m going to give you all of these things—and you can’t earn or accomplish any of them for yourself. You must live with faith in the son of promise. And, if you will simply live as if I’m going to do all this then everything else will come true.”

Let me make this clear: Abraham knew that the only way he would ever possess the promises of God is if he knew and trusted the God who promises.

The only way you will have true security in this life is not ultimately when you have the promises of God—but when you have the God who promises.

You—the promises God made to Abraham were wonderful—but Abraham would never come into those promises—he'd never realize the security of those promises without also possessing and being possessed by the God who made them.

God was telling Abraham—the only way you will find true security is by living with faith in the promised son.

Don't you see? Isaac is the son who points us to the true Son. And here's what I mean:

Think of Jesus.

He got out. He had a call. He was told, "Leave your Father's house."

We even sing about it,

He left His Father's throne above.

So free, so infinite his grace.

Emptied himself of all but love.

And bleed for Adam's helpless race.

You see—Jesus left his homeland, and he left his Father's house.

He got out. He responded to God's call. He left behind the ultimate security.

Abraham was called to get out and follow God not knowing where he would go. Jesus, the Son, was called to get out and follow God knowing exactly where he would go—it was to his death. He put

no conditions on God's plan. He followed it perfectly. There in the garden, do you remember his prayer? "Not my will, but yours!"

And he bled, and died for our sin. And Jesus is saying to us, "If you will just look at me—I've personally responded to the call of God. I didn't place any conditions on it. I laid down my life."

Why?

"For you. And, if you will simply look at what I've done, and trust it—if you will be possessed by this then you will have the same security that Abraham had."

When God says, "Get out" You'll start walking.

When God says, "Go!" You won't even ask, "Where to?"

When God calls, and his call will cause trouble in your family you'll remember that Jesus lost his family completely—for you

When God calls, and his call will ask you to give up your home you'll remember that Christ had no place to lay his head—for you.

When God calls, and his call will send you to the ends of the world you'll start packing your things because you'll remember that Christ went into your hell—for you.

When you see that he lost his ultimate securities for you—you'll be able to lose your little securities for him—because he's now your security. Let the call of God come into your life. Hear it. Surrender to it.