

Saying Goodbye to Security

Genesis 12:1-3

Introduction

I want to begin today, before we start our study of the life of Abraham in the book of Genesis, with a note of caution. We are not going to study the life of Abraham for the purpose of glorification; we are not going to make a superstar of Abraham. We do not want to do that. In fact, the church, as one man wrote, already has way too many superstars and not enough servants. There are too many people with medals and not enough people with battle scars. So, we do not seek to glorify anyone, not even Abraham, by studying his life. In fact, I am convinced, after studying Abraham's life this week, that he would be very uncomfortable and extremely fidgety under the spotlight and on the pedestal.

We are also not going to study the life of Abraham for the purpose of imitation. We are not going to try to imitate Abraham. In fact, when you imitate a man, you often will imitate his weaknesses and failures, not his strengths. We are not pursuing Abraham today. We are pursuing the God of Abraham.

We are also not going to study the life of Abraham for the simple sake of information. We are studying the book of Genesis, and Abraham stands between us and the end of the book. So, let us jump in and learn all that we can about him.

Now I am convinced that there is a danger when someone preaches or studies through the books of the Bible; through verses expositionally, that it may promote the idea that it is an end in itself or, as one man said, we are to become smarter sinners. That is not the purpose. In fact, I come to this portion in the book of Genesis with a profound sense that God means for us, at this time, to study Genesis, chapter 12. We do not know all of the reasons, but I believe He has us in Genesis, chapter 12, at this very moment. It is not a coincidence – God intends it to be life changing.

The Setting of Abram

With that said, let me introduce you to the setting of Abraham, or Abram at this point. It is in the vicinity of the Persian Gulf and is a land called Ur.

To say the name, you kind of grunt and just say, "Ur". When we speculate about this country with such a dramatic name as Ur, we can almost see the cavemen with clubs on their shoulders dragging their women about by the hair on their heads. However, that is not the case.

Life as it was in Ur

Ur was perhaps, the most civilized place in the world. Its fleets of merchant ships would float about the Indian Ocean, selling and bringing their wares to other distant places of the countryside. It was also the place that had developed an intricate legal system. The people were involved in gem engraving and metalworking, planting and harvesting, and weaving. This was no simple place that Abram was called to leave. This was the way Ur was four thousand years ago.

In Ur as well, it has been discovered that they were proficient in mathematics. In fact, mathematical formulas have been found that they were working on in that day that still to some degree, confound mathematicians today. They were also proficient in astronomy in Ur. This was the height of its cultural civilization.

Life as it was in Abram's home

Now, in the land of Ur there lived a Semite family. This was a region dominated by the Hamites, or descendants of Ham, who were idolatrous and immoral. However, right in the middle of this country was a Semite family with a little boy. That little boy would grow up to one day, change the course of human history.

We know this little Semite boy as Abram, which before his name was changed, meant "the father of many". His name will be changed to Abraham, which means "the father of a multitude or many peoples". But in Ur, we know him as Abram.

The tragic thing about Abram's home is that the idolatry of Ur had reached with clammy fingers through the door into his home. It had finally gripped the soul of his father Terah. In fact, Joshua, chapter

24, verse 2, tells us that Joshua warned the people before they entered the promised land, “Don’t forget the idolatry; namely don’t forget Abraham’s father, Terah.”

Abram’s father would be used as a warning. We tend to think that Abram was raised in a home with spiritual giants as parents, but that was not the case. We know that Abram’s father was an idolater, and he may have been participating in all the immorality that went along with that idolatry.

Before we go any further, it is worth making the application that the call of God can come regardless of one’s roots or past life. So often we get the idea that, if God is going to use someone, that person is going to be raised in the perfect home environment; that mom and dad are going to be examples of godliness. We think that is the kind of child that grows up to be used by God; that is the kind of person that will one day be called “the friend of God”.

My friend, your use and your usability in the kingdom of God will come regardless of your family. I do not want to minimize religious upbringing, as God can use that, but perhaps I am speaking to someone today who has not had that. You, like Abram, did not have an example of faith. Abraham would become the father of the faithful, yet he never had an example of what faith was all about – that was his home setting. So, take great encouragement that your family will not disqualify you for the service of God. It will not, by the way, qualify you for the service of God either.

God’s Three-fold Command To Abram

Now, with that said, let us turn to Genesis, chapter 12, and begin with the first few verses. We will take a look at the command given in these verses. It is three-fold.

Leave your society

1. The first command is basically, “Leave your society.”

Look at verse 1a of chapter 12.

Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go forth from your country . . .”

Abram’s country was idolatrous, as I have mentioned, led by the descendants of Ham. There was a warning in this, and perhaps even to the New

Testament believer. It is a warning that is alliterated by Solomon in the writings of Proverbs to be cautious and to be careful of the societal boundaries. It may mean leaving. I think even the New Testament believer is given the challenge that, although we are in this society, we are not part of it. Let me repeat what I have said before that the more like your society you become, the less you will impact it for the cause of Jesus Christ.

We do not know, but immorality and idolatry had encircled the home of Abram and perhaps was even knocking at the heart of Abram. God said, “If I can use you, you’ve got to leave.”

Now, Christ is the supreme example. He was a friend of sinners, but His purpose in being their friend was to bring them to Himself.

Let me warn you, especially young people, of the nature of ungodly friendships for the sake of friendship. Solomon wrote in Proverbs, chapter 27, verse 17b (King James Version), that,

. . . a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.

That is why he told his son to depart from evil. In Proverbs, chapter 4, verse 27b, he wrote,

. . . turn your foot from evil.

David wrote in Psalm, chapter 1, verse 1,

. . . blessed is the man who does not . . . stand in the path of sinners . . .

We are here to win the world to Christ, not be a friend to it. Perhaps that was implied in the first of this three-fold command to leave your society.

Leave your stability

2. The second command is, “Leave your stability.”

Look at the next phrase in verse 1 of Genesis, chapter 12.

Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go forth . . . from your relatives . . .”

Not only did God command Abram to go forth from his country, but to leave his relatives as well. This is the circle of friends. In fact, the archaic translation of this could be, “leave your tribe or leave your clan”. In other words, “Leave all that life has encircled you with; leave the stability of home and friends and that circle of people that you know; leave your pattern of life and break out of it. I’m going to

send you to some place totally new and different. Break out of the norm.”

This command was probably one of the most difficult things for Abram. We as well, would say, “I’ve got my friends and I’ve got my church and I’ve got my life and I’ve got my pattern and I’ve got my way of living . . .” – and all of that. We are so predictable. That is seen in the way you and I drive home the very same way from work every day. When we get home, we sit in the same chair. When we sit down at the dining table, we sit at the same place. Have you ever tried sitting somewhere else? It is weird; it is like you are in someone else’s home. Try sitting in another chair tomorrow for breakfast. Let me tell you what will happen – your kids will come in, look at you, then will look again and say, “Dad, are you still awake? Are you sick?”

“Mom, Dad has lost his marbles.”

I know what they will say. They will say, “Dad’s sitting in my chair.”

We have taught them well, haven’t we?

I think God is telling Abram to leave all of the old patterns; leave the familiar; leave the stability; leave the clan or the tribe, and go.

Leave your security

3. God also commands Abram to, “Leave your security.”

Look at the next phrase in verse 1 of Genesis, chapter 12.

Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go forth . . . from your father’s house . . .”

Notice God tells Abram to leave not only his country, but his relatives, and his father’s house.

Now, in the Middle East, your father’s house gave you a special identity. This was the place of your inheritance. This was your birthright – your security. In fact, in that day, if you married a woman, you did not leave your dad, you simply built another addition to his place and moved in. The more sons, the more wives, the more additions. Finally, this home was spreading over several acres. That was how they lived.

It was totally foreign to think of leaving your father’s house. That is exactly what God had asked Abram to do – to leave his security. There is the

implication, ladies and gentlemen, and I want you to notice this, that he will never be back.

A little boy was his grandfather’s constant companion. They would often go on short trips together – to the grocery store, sometimes to the lake to fish, or wherever the grandfather needed to go. The boy always tagged along with his grandfather and they were delightful companions.

One day, the grandfather said, “Let’s go for a ride.”

The boy asked, “Where are we going?”

The grandfather left without him. When he got back, the little boy looked crestfallen and asked, “Grandfather, why did you leave me behind?”

The grandfather looked at him and said, “Because you asked where we were going. If you really wanted to go with me, it wouldn’t have mattered where we were going.”

I think that is in the heart of the man or woman of faith. God says, “Go,” or “Do,” or “Be.”

We say “Okay, Lord, where’s the security package? What are the benefits? Where are You taking me? How long will I be there?”

So, God moves on to the next person.

Your wife says, “Hon, let’s take a walk.”

You ask, “Where are we going?”

You ask because you know the game is starting in ten minutes. The kick-off is about to happen. Your wife knows too. So does God.

So God commanded Abram, “Leave your society; leave your stability; leave your security. Leave it all behind.”

One of the difficult things, ladies and gentlemen, that we can be warned of, as individuals and as a church, is that we can fall into a pattern that is so predictable. We know exactly what is going to happen in our little conformed lives, so we never dare risk anything for God. Never stepping out in faith, we want to see it all in front of us. As a result, our usability for the kingdom of God is greatly hindered.

Let me read what one man wrote that sparked my thinking. Bruce Arson, the pastor of University Presbyterian Church, wrote these perceptive words. And I warn *all* of us as a church with these words.

I’ve observed a number of Christian organizations that have gone through the

metamorphosis from pioneer organism to rigid and predictable organization. The work is begun by one person with a dream who risks all on that dream. As the dream takes shape, other people attach themselves to the original dreamer. Before long, a movement starts. Before long, an organized machine develops with departments and charts and budgets and detailed job descriptions.

The next move, and the one that by God's grace our church will avoid, is what he calls "from machine to monument," where procedures are set in concrete, policies are unchangeable, direction is unchallenged. He continues with the following words.

The monument is a tomb. In the process, we have moved from high risk to safety and certainty. In the framework of machine or monument, nobody risks anything. In fact, we need all of our resources just to keep the machine moving.

That is the potential of a church, not just individuals.

It is illustrated well in Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta that I have seen several times. It is *The Pirates of Penzance*, and the hero's name is Frederick, if you have ever seen this. Frederick decides to capture those nasty little pirates. So he enlists the help of the police force. These policemen are typical "Keystone Cops." It is a fascinating thing to watch as the women gather in the square as the policemen declare their desire to catch the pirates. The women begin to sing, "Go on to glory, go on to glory." In fact, they even say, "Go, ye heroes, go on to glory."

The Keystone Cops begin dancing around the stage with their arms folded singing, "We go, we go." and they never went. Finally, the General interrupts them and points out, "You're not going anywhere."

They respond to him, "We go, we go."

The women are singing, "Go, ye heroes, go on to glory."

I am convinced, ladies and gentlemen, that it is possible for a church to sing *Onward Christian Soldiers*, and never take a step forward. I think the reason is because we, as one man wrote, "are so busy feathering our nests, we have no desire to fly".

We have such predictable, comfortable lives. Who is interested in going to the Promised Land?

Who wants uncertainty and risks? Who is willing to live by faith?

We must consistently ask ourselves, "Who am I serving? Who am I loving? Who am I telling about Jesus Christ? Who am I praying for? Who am I giving to? Are the sandals or the soles on our spiritual shoes showing signs of wear, or is there dust gathering there?"

We have become entombed in safety and certainty.

Let me tell a story that occurred at our house one night, just before our boys' bedtime. We have two boys who at the time of this story, were not quite three. They both had blankets – you know the kind that they carried around during the day and slept with during naptime and at night. Keaton had a white one and Seth had a green one (at least it was green at the time, although I am not sure the original color was green).

One night, my wife and I discovered that their blankets were still in the washing machine. You should have been there when I gave the boys that news. They were tucked into bed and asked, "Where's my blanket?"

I made the announcement, "Boys, your mother forgot your blankets – they are still in the washing machine."

You have never seen such a panic attack or heard such weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. They said, "We can't do without our blankets."

My wife and I had to rush to the washing machine, throw those blankets in the dryer, and hope they would dry quickly. The boys would never go to sleep. Why? Those blankets were their symbol of security. They had to have them in order to go to sleep. They were their crutch.

I find God, in Genesis, chapter 12, commanding Abram to throw away the security blanket of society, stability, security, and become a wanderer, a vagrant, a pioneer, a pilgrim. Abram was to become, as Charles Spurgeon once wrote, "shipwrecked on the island of God's sovereignty."

That is where we want to live. Responding to God's call means finding our security in God alone. Do we really want that?

God's Three-fold Blessing To Abram

Now, notice that following this three-fold command is a seven-fold promise. I will give three basic categories to help you keep these in mind.

The blessing of prominence

1. The first is the blessing of prominence.

Look at verse 2 of Genesis, chapter 12.

And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing;

Notice that He says, “I will make your name great.” That contrasts with verse 4 of chapter 11 that we previously studied. Look at that verse.

They [these idolaters] said, “Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name . . .”

Notice, in these verses, that God is basically saying, “I will provide the prominence; I will exalt your name; I will make of you many peoples. I will do that, not you.”

Solomon wrote in Proverbs, chapter 27, verse 2,

Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips.

God declared that He would make the name of Abram great. There is the blessing of prominence.

The blessing of protection

2. Secondly, there is the blessing of protection.

The first part of verse 3 says,

And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. . . .

This gives the fundamental truth that those who rise up against Israel soon find their demise – whether it is Babylon or Rome or Germany or the Palestinian Liberation Organization.

I would agree with expositors like Donald Grey Barnhouse or James Montgomery Boice, that this could be interpreted as any nation who rises up against Israel. In fact, the reason for America’s blessing, they say, is that we have been a friend to Israel. I believe it is true. In fact, even today, I watch with close scrutiny the relationship between America and Israel.

The blessing of promise

3. There is also, thirdly, the blessing of a promise.

The last part of verse 3 says,

. . . and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.

This includes all the families of the earth – not just the Jews; not just the Semites, but all the families.

This is the promise of a Redeemer. Turn to Galatians, chapter 3, and we will look at a couple of verses that make this so clear. We will begin in verses 8 and 9.

The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying “All the nations will be blessed in you.” So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.

It is hard to see this in Genesis, but in these verses it is delineated. He preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, and the gospel was that all the nations would be blessed in Abraham, so that those of faith would be blessed with him.

Look at verses 28 and 29 of the same chapter.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise.

If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.

There was the promise given to Abraham, the “euangelion,” the gospel, the evangelistic thrust of this Abrahamic Covenant that, “By your obedience, Abraham, I will bring from your seed, the One that will bless the whole world,” speaking of Jesus Christ Himself.

The Response of Abram Defines “Submission”

Now read the first part of verse 4 of Genesis, chapter 12. How did Abram respond?

So Abram went forth as the Lord had spoken to him . . .

As I studied this passage, a lot of different words came to my mind that characterize the life of Abraham

– words such as: obedience, faith, willingness to risk and to change. However, one word that seemed to strike me the most was the word “submission”. In fact, I think we can find from these few verses in Genesis, two principles related to submission. We will call this a definition. Let me give them to you.

Submission is believing without comprehending

1. First, submission is believing without comprehending.

God said, “Abraham, I want to make you a father of nations.”

Did Abraham comprehend that promise? No.

“Abraham, I am going to take you west, southwest, to a new land.”

Did he comprehend where it was? No.

However, he submitted to the call. Submission is believing without comprehending.

A letter has been discovered that was written during Abraham’s time, by an exiled Egyptian to his Pharaoh. This man was sent away from Egypt in exile by the Pharaoh to the unknown land of Palestine. I quote from David Hocking, who read a copy of the letter. The man writes his Pharaoh this spiteful letter.

Here where you have exiled me, are figs and grapes, where there is more wine than water. Honey and oil are plentiful. All kinds of fruit hang upon the trees. Barley and wheat grow in the fields, and herds of cattle of all types graze here.

He kind of laughs, “Ha, ha! You’ve exiled me here, and this is an oasis.”

I cannot help but think of Abraham leaving Ur, the place of fantastic civilization. It was by its own right, a fertile region. He is heading through the Arabian desert, probably scratching his head thinking, “God, where are You taking me?”

Abraham does not know that just beyond the desert is a place like this. He submitted without comprehending. The point is that God knew.

Submission is obeying without understanding

2. Secondly, submission is obeying without understanding.

Turn to Hebrews, chapter 11, verse 8. You must see this. Verse 8 reads,

By faith, Abraham, when he was called [in Genesis, chapter 12, verses 1-3], obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; . . .

(note the next words – you should underline them in your text),

. . . and he went out, not knowing where he was going.

Try taking a vacation with your family without a roadmap. I always have the trip completely mapped out. However, in this call of God, there was the element of submission without understanding.

God did not give Abraham a detailed road map saying, “Abraham, here’s what’s going to happen there. And this is what is going to happen to you here.”

God just said, “Go.”

And though he did not understand it, Abraham went.

God has not given any of us a detailed road map. We do not know what is around the bend. His will for us may mean the loss of a job or the loss of a loved one by death or divorce. His will may mean financial loss, sickness, or pain. It may mean wealth. It may mean standing alone. The key, as with Abraham, is that we have the confidence in our soul that we are traveling with God, and that we know He is sovereign. And, more than anything else, rather than have an answer, we would rather have Him as our companion. And so we go with God.

Imagine the wonder of being considered, as is said of Abraham three times throughout the Bible, “the friend of God”. In fact, God will even refer to Himself as, “the God of Abraham”. What an honor.

I think of what Jesus Christ wrote in John, chapter 15, verse 13,

Greater love has no one than this, that one [Himself] lay down his life for his friends.

It is delightful knowing that when you come to the cross and give Jesus Christ your sin and trust Him with yourself and your life, He becomes your friend – you become a friend of God. Believer, when you live this kind of life – willing to risk, willing to change, willing to serve, willing to love, pray, and give – God says of you, “You are My friend.”

Submission is obeying what you believe God wants you to do to advance His cause.

I will close with a story that Sam Kamaleson, who is the vice president of a mission organization, told. It is a story of a seventy year old lady who came to Christ.

This lady, who lived in Melbourne, came to her new pastor one day and said, "I believe God has called me into the ministry. What should I do?"

He said exactly what I would have said, "Well, maybe you ought to pray about it."

What classic advice. He did not have a clue, but at least he was not wrong. "Go home and pray."

She did. The lady went home and began to pray. It seemed that God was impressing her heart to do one particular thing. She went to the drugstore and bought a batch of 3 inch by 5 inch index cards. She wrote on the cards the words, "Are you homesick? Come to my home for tea at 4:00."

She took that stack of 3 by 5 cards and went all around the University of Melbourne and put them on poster boards. She placed them in places where people would see them; such as the cafeteria. "Are you homesick? Come to my home for tea at 4:00."

The lady prepared tea at 4:00. Days went by and no one came, but she continued to prepare tea. Finally, on the fifteenth day, an Indonesian student showed up at her door, homesick and as eager to talk as she was to listen. So, she served tea to him and listened.

The student went back to the campus and told all of his friends, "Hey, you won't believe it! I met a lady that's just like my grandmother."

Soon many students were coming. God gave that lady a ministry for ten years. When she died, there were no less than seventy pallbearers – Indonesians, Malaysians, Indians, Pakistanis – international students who had come to her home and found Jesus Christ. She had served them tea and shared the gospel.

This was a lady who had heard and obeyed the call of God. You might say, "Boy, I wish God would give me a call. I wish He'd impress my heart."

Are you praying? Are you wanting? Are you desiring? Are you asking, "Lord, I, by faith, want to make a difference in this world for Your kingdom. Make it clear where."?

My friend, are you a friend of God? He is your friend, and will accept you. Believer, are you a man

or a woman of faith, willing to leave it all behind for the sake of being the companion of God?