

“The Great Exchange” Genesis 12:1-5

Today we embark on a journey with the first patriarch of the Jewish nation, and the prototype of faith for all Christians: Abraham. In Romans 4:3 we read:

“What does Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

So Abraham becomes an important role model and example of faith for every generation. His story speaks to us even though we live 4000 years removed from him. Ready to start the journey?

We begin in a place called Ur of the Chaldeans. This ancient city in what is now known as Iraq is likely the birthplace of Abraham. His father Terah gathers the family and starts the long journey to a land called Canaan. However, before they arrive, Terah settles in a place called Harran. There he stays until his death at 205 (11:32)! Abraham is one of three sons, and he will be our focus for the next few weeks.

Abraham is married to Sarai, but they have no family. This fact is an important detail that will shape the story in the weeks to come. Following Abraham’s story it appears he is well off, with hired workers and flocks. Scripture does not tell us much about Harran, nor how long Abraham stayed there with his father. But one has to wonder if the values in that city were similar to those we hold today.

What are our World’s Present values?

Someone has suggested there are four main values in our society today (sorry, I do not know who that “someone” is). But what he says seems to ring true. You decide if these are the things people value today:

- a. Well being. We want to feel good about ourselves. We want to feel that we matter, that we have purpose. This makes us feel good about ourselves, builds self-esteem.
- b. Security: this is usually defined in terms of our job, our home, our friends, our family. Most studies I have read indicate that security is high on the list of values for women in particular.
- c. Prosperity: Now that is a subject that even people in religious circles want to discuss. We hear people pray the prayer of Jabez, “O Lord, I pray that you would bless me indeed...” hoping God would grant them riches. What is prosperity? For the person living on the street it may mean a roof over his head. To the person in a low cost rental it may be to own her own small home. For the person in the two bedroom bungalow it may mean owning a five bedroom mansion, with swimming pool and a view of the ocean! We may all define prosperity differently, but we all seem to want it!
- d. Prominence or acceptance: This is how others view us. We want to be seen as important and welcomed into group. If someone will follow us – all the better!

These four values seem to be a part of all of us to some extent. I read of a conversation a man had with someone who for all appearance seemed to have all four of these things. He was asked if he was successful, and this was his response: "You know, I have been thinking about that a lot lately, and I guess I would say my life is, well... empty and kind of dry. I don't feel like I am making much difference to anyone but me and my family, and sometimes I wonder about that. I guess I just feel ... barren.

He continued: "When I got out of college, I set some goals for myself. I wanted a good job, a good family; I wanted to be a success. And by that measure I am. I wanted a house, then a bigger house. I got them. Cars, a boat, lots of stuff. I've got a nice family and I love them, I really do. But what's next? There has to be more to life than this. I've been planning for retirement. I've got everything under control. But then what? Isn't there more? Sometimes I just keep busy to keep from thinking about all that. But then, I guess that is life."

That man achieved the things our society values and guess what? He still felt empty. I wonder how many people in Abraham's day felt the same way? I wonder if Abraham ever felt this way? He had it all, at least as far as the world saw it, but was it enough?

God knows us and how we tick. He should – he created each one of us. Yes, each of us is a unique creation from God: "He knit me together in my mother's womb," Psalm 139 tells us. Maybe we do need more in life than just well being, security, prosperity and prominence as defined by society. If we need more than this world is offering, you can be sure our loving Heavenly Father will provide it. This is what he did for Abraham. Let's read some of his story – Genesis 12:1-5.

God Speaks

Suddenly Abraham's world is turned upside down. He was comfortable in the world he had made for himself and his wife when suddenly God shows up and says, "Go... leave your country, your people, your father's household... and I will make you a great nation in a land I will show you!"

This is the first covenant promise to Abraham. Sounds good... "I will make you a great nation..." but doesn't God realize there is a problem? In Genesis 11:30 we read that "Sarai had no children because she could not conceive." How could God build a nation from an old man and an old woman who do not have any children? Abraham is 75 years old already and Sarai is 65. A little late to start planning a family...

I wonder if Abraham was tempted to do what we do ... measure what God says he will do by what we have. I need a new car? I guess it will be a \$300 car because that is all I have in the bank account!

"God, I have a wife who cannot get pregnant, so I guess that counts us out for being the builders of a nation." We tend to look at why things cannot turn out the way God says they will because we cannot see how God could provide. Our problems are too big. The needs are too

great. We forget what Jesus said in Mark 10:27: “With men this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God!”

To Abraham God says these important words: “I will...”

- I will make you into a great nation
- I will bless you and I will make your name great
- I will bless those who bless you, and curse those who curse you.

Can Abraham believe that if God says it, it will be so – it will happen? Can he believe that the word of God would overcome all obstacles, even barrenness?

If God says, “I will...” do we believe it is so? In Matthew 4:19 we read Jesus say to us, “Follow me and **I will** make you...” Even today Jesus is calling us and says “I will make you... I will lead you... I will use you for my glory... I will never leave you... “

God is speaking to all of us. What will he do for you?

God’s Call Comes with Risk

God says to Abraham, “Leave your country...” Leave your security, the way you have always done things, the gods you knew in Harran, the comfortable life you made for yourself, and come, follow me.... Put your future into my hands!

I can imagine that line, “Put your future into my hands” brings fear to many people:

- Fear that God can’t guide you, so you choose your own way.
- Fear that God can’t protect you, so you don’t let people know you are a Christian – you keep silent about your faith.
- Fear that God can’t satisfy, so you act religious but rely on your own decisions, popularity or priorities to guide you.
- Fear God can’t provide, so you take things into your own hands.

And this fear leads to barrenness in our lives. God has given time, talent and finances but we are afraid to offer them to Him. We are not sure where He will lead us, so we hold back. We do not realize that God is calling us to enter into his promise – “I will...” – and we continue to live in barrenness.

Remember what Jesus said in Mark 8:35: “Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and the Gospel will save it.”

God’s Call is a Call to Hope

Please note that God’s call comes with hope!

- I will make you a great nation
- I will bless you
- I will make your name great
- I will bless those who bless you

What hope to be blessed of God in these ways. The things Abraham valued – and we value - well being, security, prosperity and prominence, when defined by society or our own selfish ambitions never satisfy. But look at what God is promising Abraham and you will see the same values, but now filled with the blessing of God. They are now filled with hope and life.

Conclusion

Abraham must now make a choice. Will he trust God to lead him, will he go or will he stay where he is comfortable? Will he heed the call of God or ignore Him?

What does it say in verse 4? “So Abram went, as the Lord had told him.” He was 75 years of age but he was on the move to ... well, he did not know yet, but God would lead him. He took with him his wife, his nephew, all his possessions and all his people (servants and workers) and started out to Canaan, the Promised Land.

Abraham’s journey is our journey, is it not? We too must decide if we will follow the promise of God, or stay where we are. The promise of God sounds like this,

“Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—“ John 1:12

And

“Whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16

And there is so much more for those who trust in Jesus for salvation. Just read the Word of God and hear God speak to you. He still calls us, and promises us, “I will...” Now the question is, will we trust Jesus to come through on his promises? Do we believe God can still do the impossible....

Karl ran a thrift store, and one day a preacher entered his store to buy a TV. Sensing a spiritual need the preacher returned. Karl was a little shocked and incredulous that a preacher would call on him. “You don’t understand, preacher. I am either doing or have done every sin except murder. I cheat on my wife, I gamble, I get drunk, I steal ... you name it. God can’t help me. You’re wasting your time.”

The preacher kept coming back and sharing with Karl, until one day Karl was passing the church on a Tuesday night, and noticing cars at the church he slipped into the building. It was a Bible study, and people were sharing testimonies of God’s goodness. They sounded genuine and life giving. As the study was about to conclude the pastor asked if there were any questions. Karl asked, “Pastor, can a man get saved on a Wednesday night?” Well that night God answered the prayer of a sinner for forgiveness, and his life changed. A few weeks later Karl discovered the blessing of full surrender as the Holy Spirit filled his heart. He discovered holiness.

The story does not end there. Karl's oldest son had been in prison, and though he was filled with bitterness towards his father, he came home on his release. Karl invited his son to attend church with him, and though he was reluctant, he went. One Sunday when the invitation was given, inviting anyone who wanted Jesus in their life to come forward, Karl's son came to the altar to pray. When the pastor asked the boy what he wanted God to do for him, the answer went something like this: "I don't know much about God or religion. But I sure want what my dad has."

All things are possible with God. Can you believe that today? Can you trust in God's promises that he will... ? Can you trust your life in God's hands and let Him lead you?

This message is called "The Great Exchange." God invites us to exchange our plans and goals and dreams for His plans and goals and dreams for us. God has promised so much for those who will follow him – will you be one of those people? I guarantee you, make the exchange – give up your plans and accept God's plans for your life – and you will come out on the winning side.

The ball is in your court – what will you do with God's call on your life?