

GENESIS: THE BEGINNING IS NOT THE END

The First Picture of Faith

TEXT: Genesis 11:27-12:4, Romans 4:3-13, Hebrews 11:8-10, James 2:20-26

INTRODUCTION: It is not easy to have a biblical worldview in the world today. I am not sure it has ever been easy, but I am sure it is not easy today.

One of the reasons is that while we live in a culture that knows the Bible in the sense that they are aware that it exists and they have heard of some things written in it, and we even have large portions of our culture that would hold the words of the Bible as special and even godly, the reality is that most people in the world, even in the United States, have never read the Bible.

Can you understand that it is hard to have a biblical worldview if you have never read the Bible? Now if you are one of those, I am not going to ask you to raise your hand nor come to the altar at the end of the sermon and repent. Repenting would be good, but you can do that with God; and you don't have to tell me or anybody else.

But what I really want to appeal to you to do is to start reading your Bible regularly. Last week, I mentioned a Bible reading plan that has blessed me, and many of you picked up a copy of that plan. We have refreshed the stack, and you will find more of them available at the desk in the Welcome Center.

Those that really want to have and live by a biblical worldview will need to regularly read the Scriptures, because we receive so much input from sources around us that are contrary to a biblical worldview, that it is a challenge to keep the truth readily available in both mind and heart.

I think my own **misguided understanding of the Bible** through my high school years remains a misunderstanding of many people today. I thought that

- **People during Old Testament times were saved by their works**, by keeping the Old Testament Law. Because people failed miserably at being able to keep the OT Law,
- **In New Testament times, God** changed the rules through the sending of His Son Jesus and **offered salvation by grace through faith for those who believed in Christ.**

But that is not what the Bible says. That common understanding does not come from a biblical worldview or from the Bible at all. In fact, the New Testament tells us of Old Testament people who received God's salvation. Chief among those who are named who lived before Jesus Christ entered the world was a man by the name of Abram. We know him better by the new name God gave him – Abraham.

The New Testament clearly shows us in Romans, Galatians, Hebrews, and James **that Abraham was saved in the exact same way as** Peter, James, and John; in

exactly the same way as **any of us** in this room have been saved, **by grace through faith**.

Romans 4:3 For what does the Scripture say? "*Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.*"

Other people were saved before Abraham, but the Holy Spirit desired to give us a clear picture of salvation by grace through faith through the life of this man. Abraham provides to us the First Picture of Faith. This picture occupies more than twelve chapters of Scripture. There is much in this picture of faith, and in our typical hurried consideration of the Scriptures, we often miss parts of it.

First we see

I. THE BEGINNING OF FAITH

Genesis 12:1–4 1 Now the LORD had said to Abram:
"Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you.
2 I will make you a great nation;
I will bless you And make your name great;
And you shall be a blessing.
3 I will bless those who bless you,
And I will curse him who curses you;
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."
4 So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

A. Faith always begins with God's initiative.

God made the promise, and He made it without condition.

I will make you a great nation;
I will bless you And make your name great;
And you shall be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
And I will curse him who curses you;
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

B. God initiates our salvation in two ways.

1. Jesus' death in our place upon the cross.
2. The Holy Spirit convicting us of sin and convincing us to trust Christ.

The first is done once and for all.

The second is done at a time or times of God's own choosing.

That is why it is indescribably dangerous to delay our response until another time.

God may or may not draw a person at a later time by the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

John 6:44 No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.

That is why the Spirit pleads with us in Hebrews

Hebrews 4:7 ... *“Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts.”*

And here we see

II. THE ESSENCE OF FAITH

Our part is to respond by trusting God.

1. Abraham believed God.
2. Abraham believed sufficiently to obey. God said, “Go ...,” Abraham went.
3. **Faith is not just mental assent. It is commitment that results in action.**
This is the point of James in his epistle. He points out that Abraham acted out of his belief.
4. **When we trust Christ, we must trust Him as Lord, Master, Boss.**

Romans 10:9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

5. **This is what faith means.**
 - a. **It is trust that obeys.**
 - b. **It is trust that follows.**

This is what Abraham did, and why he offers to us such a clear picture of faith.

God said, “Abram, I want you to march off the map to a land you have never seen, because although you and Sarai are childless, I will give you a son and many descendants after him. In fact, I will make your family into a mighty nation. And one day, Abram, one of your descendants will become a blessing to everyone who lives upon the face of the earth.”

Abraham believed God. Abraham trusted God enough to leave his comfortable home in Ur of the Chaldees, at this point in history, one of the most civilized and comfortable places on the whole planet, putting his life and eternity into the hands of God.

Genesis summarizes it this way:

Genesis 15:6 And he [Abraham] believed in the LORD, and He [the Lord] accounted it to him for righteousness.

By grace, through faith, Abraham was saved!

You know, one of the things that testifies to the veracity and dependability of the Scriptures is that they never sugar coat anything. Abraham is certainly one of the heroes of faith, and he is treated as such in both Old and New Testaments. Abraham was so highly regarded by the Lord Himself, that He called Abraham “the friend of God.” Yet, when Abraham messed up, the story gets told on the pages of Holy Writ for all to see. And that helps the rest of us who realize we have not lived up to Abraham’s example, to remember that even he had his frailties.

We see the first of these soon after Abraham came to faith.

III. A PAUSE IN FAITH

Honestly, it’s easy to miss this. But the story of Abraham does not begin in Genesis 12. It starts in Genesis 11:27. If you read from 11:27 to 12:4 carefully, you find this is what happened:

- While Abram lived in Ur, **God told Abram to go** to the land He would show him and God made the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant to him.
- **Abram believed God and set out for** what we know today as **Canaan**, a journey of around 1100 miles by the major trade routes, taking his father Terah, his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, and others living in his household with him. Abram was about 40 years old when he left Ur of the Chaldeans.
- **They stopped in** Haran, a major city just over half way to their destination. They stayed in **Haran until Abram’s father, Terah, died.**
- Now here is the clincher of all this. **They stayed in Haran about 35 years!**
- **Then, at age 75, Abram went to the land God told him to go to.**

Wow, Abraham, that was quite a pause in the exercising of your faith! You believe God and obey in faith, uprooting the family to go to the land God has promised to give you. You travel for several weeks, carrying in wagons all the family owns, leading herds and flocks to God’s new place for you, and then you stop! You are halfway there and you stop – for 35 years?

What happened?

- Did somebody get wagon-sick?
- Did two of the camels have a wreck?
- Was the travel just too torturous?
- Was the outpost at Haran too comfortable to leave again?

We simply do not know.

However, we do know what it is like to be tempted to put off doing what God has told you to do, don’t we?

Karen and I do.

- We had been married almost four years. We had taken vows to each other knowing that each of us had already taken a vow to be obedient to the calling God had placed on each of our lives to serve Him.
- I had completed my undergraduate degree the year before and Karen had just graduated.
- We were both on staff at FBC, OK City doing bus ministry, positions we had begun during our last year in college. Karen was part-time as she finished school and I was full-time leading the bus ministry of seven routes in the city.
- We both also had part-time jobs driving school busses. (Yes, little ole Karen drove a 66 passenger bus full of middle school kids, twice a day, rain, snow, ice, and all!) In addition, I had a newspaper route of over 300 papers to be thrown on the porch by 6 a.m. 7 days a week.
- We were young, strong, and healthy; but we were very tired.
- We were quite certain that the next step in God's plan for us was to leave OK City in August and go to seminary.
- That is when the temptation to pause came to us. The temptation was not for us to abandon our calling or to quit serving the Lord. In fact, it came as an invitation from one of the most going and growing churches in Oklahoma. Tom Elliff was pastor of the Exciting Eastwood Baptist Church in Tulsa where Karen and I met and married. Tom and I had met at a Bus Ministry Conference where we were both speaking. Tom wanted me to come lead his church's very large bus ministry.

We were surprised and honored to even be considered. We went to Tulsa to meet with Tom and a couple of his staff. We toured the church, and Tom took us to lunch. Then he took us out to a new subdivision where a builder in his church built new houses at reduced costs for staff members. Tom mentioned they had a member with a car dealership that could also give us a very special deal on vehicles.

This was sounding pretty delightful to a couple who had lived in tiny apartments and shared a car that was more than 20 years old. However, there was one thing Pastor Tom said was non-negotiable. He wanted a five year commitment.

We could understand his desire. He wanted, needed stability in that ministry. But for us, it meant a five year postponement of seminary. The day before Tom called us, we were certain God was wanting us to go to seminary in just a matter of months.

But if we would just put going to seminary on pause, just 5 years, we could have a bigger ministry at a really growing church, with a decent salary. We could give up all the part-time jobs next week. We might be able to buy a house. We might be able to get a car that did not have a 6 volt battery in it.

But it meant putting what God had called us to do on pause. We prayed. I think we mostly tried to talk God into this new deal. God didn't budge, and we both knew it. In one of the most difficult calls I had ever made at that time in my life, I called Tom and told him we couldn't come.

Has something like that ever happened to you, fellow believer?

Even more importantly, is something like that happening to you right now?

Is there something that God has told you to do, and you have already said yes. Maybe you got started. Maybe you did it for a while. But then something happened that put it on pause.

- Maybe a few weeks
- A few months
- A few years
- Like Abraham, a lot of years

God may have sent you on mission. You said yes. You done some missions, but now you're on pause.

Maybe God has called you to teach and you said yes, and you have taught; you were a teacher for years. But now you're on pause.

That may have happened already to some of you who started tithing or otherwise being a better steward when we saw what God said about our stewardship last January. Maybe you tithed faithfully for a couple of months, but then you hit the pause button. You didn't tell God you quit. You intend to start back up. But right now you're on pause.

CONCLUSION: I want to urge you this morning to do one thing Abraham did and urge you not to do another thing he did.

Like Abraham, I urge you to end the pause. Return to obeying the Lord in whom you have put your faith. Whatever caused you to pause in following what He has said to you, put it aside, deal with it another way, but hit the play button on obedience and faith.

Unlike Abraham, don't wait 35 years! When you get to heaven and you see him, I am confident he will tell you the same. He missed out on some things by delaying his obedience for 35 years. For one thing, when he got to Canaan and God had him walk through the entire land, he was 75 years old. It would have been easier when he was 40, and he probably would have enjoyed the trip more. So will you!