

Good evening well we're continuing our series in Genesis and today we come to the start of the story of Abraham

Few men, outside of Jesus Christ, have had such a huge impact on world history as Abraham He is considered the Father of **our** Faith, the Father of the Jewish Faith and the Father of Islamic Faith

More than half the world, along with believers in the NT, would call themselves "children of Abraham"

This is one important guy

For us, he is an example of a man who lived by faith and was called the "Friend of God".
- No-one else in the whole Bible is given this title: "the Friend of God".

Abraham stood against his society, his family, his culture and was part of something radically new We take Monotheism (the worship of one God) as obvious and universal but back then, in Abraham's time, it was almost unheard of They worshipped 100s of god's.

They had
god's for the river, the sky, the mountains, the rocks,
god's for the harvest, rain, snow and sun,
god's for war, for love, for luck, for fertility

Abraham stood alone for the God that we know:
He was a great man, a flawed man, but mostly a man who walked with God.

For us,
How do you get that kind of greatness?
How do we live AS distinctively as this man?
How do we live for truth in our culture?
Well it begins with the call of God.
What made Abraham great was the call of God and his response
What can make us like Abraham, is the same: the call of God in our life and response.

So this evening I want to that, I want to talk about the
The **power** of the call in our life
The **radical nature** of the call; and
The **fulfilment** of the call.

The power, the radical nature, the fulfilment of the call of God in our life
So would you turn with me to p13 and we'll look at

1. The Power of the Call

Chapter 11v29 reads

The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and v30 she was barren; she had no children.

*So v31 Terah took them and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan.
But when they came to Haran, they settled there...
and Terah died in Haran.*

This is the journey they took,
They set off from UR in the bottom right hand corner, to head for Canaan (way on the left).
They couldn't go straight east-west because of the desert.
So they go via Haran, and there they stop.

And that's bad – because they stop seriously short of their target...
and Terah dies and that's worse
Because now, by themselves, they are never going to get to Canaan.
And what this means is that, symbolically,
any hope that humanity would get itself out of the mess it had created was gone.

Let me explain myself
Ur, the place that they left was a centre of intellectual activity.
It had a large public library, it was prosperous, relatively advanced and it was Spiritually dead.

All the way back, from Genesis chapter 2, humanity has been spiralling down into a spiritual abyss.
In Genesis 6 we have the most chilling social commentary ever made over any civilisation,
It reads like this...

*The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become,
and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.
And the Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.*

God looked at what humanity was doing and it filled his heart with pain!
humanity's **every** inclination, **only** evil, all the time!
Can you imagine living with someone whose *every* inclination, was only *evil* all the time!
It would have been hell!
Now multiply that 1,000 fold

Humanity has no moral law, it has no commandments, no Holy Spirit to restrain it.
It has rejected God and although it is becoming *technically* more advanced,
spiritually it is becoming more and more bankrupt
as the memory of God fades with each new generation
It was in spiritual free-fall.

And the only hope in all of this, as we saw in Genesis 4,
was **one** family, one family line that retained its desire to reach out to God.
This is Seth's family which became Noah's family which became Abraham's family.

And in Genesis 11v31 Terah, Abraham and his wife and Lot
are on their way to the promised land,
they are symbolically setting out to rediscover God

But they fall short & Terah dies & Sarai is barren.
And so this is the end of the line.
They are going no-where.

And into this spiritually barren, hopeless, lost place God speaks
And his call is both necessary and gracious

1.1 It is necessary

Without intervention – the last candle-flame of hope has just flickered out.
Terah is dead, Sarai is barren, they have given up their journey.
Without God's call - its "game over".

Even though Abraham was FROM THE best family the world had to offer –
if God didn't call him: he was spiritually dead.

Whoever we are, no matter what family we come from
we need the call of God in our life.

*Look, my children have been raised in Southover
This is a good church, the gospel is preached, we are outward looking, mission is primary,
This is a good church for my kids to grow up in.*

*And our home... Amanda and I have done everything we can to present God in an attractive way (we
screw up of course)
but we have done everything we can to show that God is loving and trustworthy*

*but unless they personally hear the call of God in their life,
hear God disturb them, humble them, convict them, call them to find him –
unless they hear that call
they will end up just lovely idolaters!*

*I'm not being rude!
What I mean is they'll end up "lovely people" (after all they've got me as their dad!!)
lovely people BUT who live to please themselves, to please others, to look for the wrong sort of gods
in their life (be it career, family, home, comfort)...*

You see it doesn't matter who your family is-
(Abraham's family was the best humanity had to offer!)
it doesn't matter how nice or moral or religious we are
unless we recognise the call of God in our life we are going to live for something or someone else
other than God.
This is obvious.

Abraham came from the best sort of family but unless he hears the call of God – he is a spiritual
dead-man walking.
He is going no-where.

He will fade into obscurity.

The “call” is absolutely vital... – lost without it!

Do you hear it?, have you ever heard it?,
have you ever been called from spiritually “where you are” to where God can be found?
It’s powerfully necessary.

1.2 It is also powerfully gracious

Chapter 12v1

The Lord says to Abram,

By the way, you’ll see Abraham is called Abram here.

Abram means Father – Abraham means ‘Father of many’

Abram means Daddy - Abraham means “big daddy”.

When I was the Father of one child I was daddy –

but when I became a Father of 5... I could say “who’s the daddy!”

Same idea!

Abraham hears the call because God speaks...

God doesn’t have to. God isn’t obliged to.

God could have said “you’ve made your bed now lie in it”

But he doesn’t

His act of speaking, is an act of Grace, it an act of love

Abraham does deserve God’s rescue plan

He doesn’t qualify for a relationship with God

There is nothing about him that demands God’s attention

This is an act of Grace.

God owes him no favours!

And it’s the same for us...

None of us are perfect, none of us pure, none of us are so holy that we demand God’s attention

In the scale of the Universe we are space dust,

In the time-span of the universe our life is over in a flash

That God speaks to us, calls us is an act of absolute grace.

we don’t deserve it or qualify for it

But its power is that it can change us – we need it.

Firstly, it is necessary, it is grace.

second

2. It is Radical.

The call is a radical call

The LORD had said to Abram,

“Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.

2.1 This is personally radical!

leave your country?, leave your people?, leave your family?

This is no small ask!

leave your culture, leave your people, leave your identity

and I will give you a new place, a new people, a new purpose, a new reason to live, a new name!

If this isn't personally radical then I don't know what is!

If you ever hear God's call on your life it will be personally radical.

Even a cursory knowledge of the New Testament will show that the words of Jesus "follow me" will never leave us the same.

If we think that following God – is like following our own ideas but with a just few religious bells and whistles – we're absolutely wrong

If we think God's ways are just like our ways – but with a bit extra "niceness" they aren't

If you hear God's call, be under no illusions, it is personally radical – it will not leave you the same.

Because secondly,

2.2 Its a call 'to radically trust'

Because God says to Abraham

"Leave your country, your people and your household and go to the land

I WILL show you.

Do you see that – leave and THEN I'll show you!

Not *"look up Canaan on Google Earth and see how good it is, and when you're convinced give it a go"*

but "go" and I'll show you later!

"Go, but I am not going to tell you where"

Just trust me!

And Abraham doesn't say

"you want me to go - OK

what size house will I have, how big will the bedrooms be, what sort of job will I have, how many cattle will you give me, what will the climate be like, will I like it there"

Abraham doesn't ask these questions

He just goes... now this is profound.

You know, if you're thinking of following Jesus

You could be saying, "well before I trust you, before I take this step of faith,

I just need to ask a few questions

Will I have to break up with my boyfriend or girlfriend?

will I be able to live the same way?

will my life change too much?

If we ask those questions
What we are really saying is
“Yes God I hear your call – but can I trust you?!”
Can you deliver, are your motives good...?

These are the sort of questions of someone *who doesn't know who God is!*
But God is the God of the Universe – of course he can deliver
God is the God who is gracious enough to step into our life to bless us – of course his motives are good!

Isn't it simply crazy to say to God
“Follow you? – well I don't know? – will you make it worth my while??!!”
This would be MADNESS.

Our journey with God cannot be like this, and
it certainly can't **start out** like this.
If we don't trust him – then he can never be God in our life!

The call is to trust.
So that we say “Where you go I will go, Where you stay I will stay, Your people will be my people and you will be my God”.

God's call is to trust: to say “you are in the driving seat”

And this is Christianity – a life of trust in God, a journey with God, an adventure for God.

And unless we can say to God –
I know your call impacts me personally completely,
I know your call is to trust you - and I will!
Then we are not yet a Christian

We are not a Christian if we say “I will obey IF... if I get it, if I see it, if I agree with it”
We are not a Christian if we say “I will follow but not too far, not too fast, not too much”

The call is necessary, its gracious
It's personal and it is to trust
and finally it is

2.3 It is Missionally Radical too

God says, v2

and I will make you into a great nation

and I will bless you;

and I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing to all peoples on earth"

Because the adventure that God calls us on is to be a BLESSING to OTHERS

God blesses us so that we may be a blessing to others

David Garratt said on Thursday at Alpha

that our society has sold us the lie that to be blessed we must “get” for ourselves.

Get money, get comfort, get qualifications, get family, get job.

4,000 years ago God was teaching humanity that “to be blessed” we must “BE a blessing”.

To become a Christian is to be changed so that now our decisions are not all about what is most comfortable for us, what do we get out of this but “where can I most BE a blessing”.

We learn with God – that if we seek to be blessed we shall be empty.

But if we seek to bless others then we shall be full.

We learn that we can be a blessing to others, so God blesses us

SO THAT we can be even more of a blessing to others.

If you live to fill others up – God will fill us up.

Isn't this counter-cultural

Isn't this different to anything the world teaches us!

God's call – it is to a life, and an adventure that is radically different.

So how can we start this journey?

where can we find the strength to fulfil God's call?

the answer is

3. Its about our Response ...

So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; ...

and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. ...

Firstly, Abram did it

3.1 He responded! He obeyed and started out.

He took the step.

They say the journey of a 1,000 miles start with a step.

Well it does!

At some point in our life we have to take that first step.

God says to us “will you journey with me?”

Will you “come” will you “go”

Will you look beyond this world, and leave behind its self-focused culture?

Will you let go of the illusory security of this world (and stop putting your faith in qualifications, possessions, looks, personality, popularity)?

Will you let “the one who made you” and longs to bless you, guide you and shape you and lead you?

Will you leave this kingdom and go and find a different one?

Will you be a blessing to others?

Will you make a difference?
We don't know how long he ask those questions

But each time we hear them – we don't deserve them – they are acts of grace!
And we need to respond!
If you would ...
then tonight you have that opportunity
But I want to say one thing more – which is **for all of us** who have started this journey.

3.2 We need to keep Journeying

Terah started the journey – but he never finished it
he never saw the promised land
he was never given a new name by God
He never discovered God for himself
And he died in no-man's land.
We know nothing about him.

But *v4 So Abram left... and*
v5 arrived and
v7 the LORD appeared to Him.

Abram started this journey and
he encountered God; and
he saw the promised land; and
God gave him a new name.

Beginning the adventure is not enough.
Christianity isn't about a "step of faith"
Its about a life-time of "steps of faith"
it's a journey of faith.

And as we travel with God both our trust and our knowledge of him increases.
The Lord "appeared to Abraham".
The first time God spoke, the second time God appeared.
The first time Abraham heard, the second time he saw.

v7 And God said
"To your offspring I will give this land."

To your offspring - singular - I will give you this land
To your "seed" singular – I will fulfil my promise –

The New Testament is clear "this seed, this offspring" is Jesus.
The line of Seth, the line of Noah and the line of Abraham.

All through Abraham's life God is revealing more and more of himself
Abraham's hears, he sees he understands more and more.

The Substituted Sacrifice of Abraham's first born Son
The Son of the Promise
The Hope of the World
His substitution by a sacrifice <quotes? "which God would provide"
he understood – but at a distance – looking forward

We get to look back.
So if you are looking for inspiration on how to worship God
If you are looking for a reason to follow
If you are asking the question "can God be trusted, does he love me"

Then look to Jesus
He heard the call,
He left his home, his Father, his glory to travel to another country.
He had to learn to trust.

As a small child you can bet your life he hadn't a clue what God was going to do with him – but he trusted
As a teenager he began to get a sense of the need of mankind – and his central role - and he trusted
As a man – he stepped into ministry – headed for a cross – and journeyed into the abyss of sin and death – and he trusted!

Look to Jesus on the cross
Look to Jesus in your journey, at the start of your journey and ask the question "can God be trusted, does he love me?" ... it will not even leave your lips...

If you look at the cross and don't think he loves you –
don't even attempt to answer the call
If you look at the stars, the cosmos, the design of life, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and you doubt his ability to know what he is doing –
don't even attempt to answer the call.

But if you hear the call
if you would stand for God
in your culture, in your family, in the face of your temptations
if you would be a blessing to others then follow me in this prayer...
Because now is the time to take the step to begin, to continue the journey...