

The call of God (as exemplified in Abraham)

Part 1

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[00:00:01] You may care to turn back with me to the book of Genesis and chapter 11.

We'll start reading at verse 31. And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife. And they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees to go into the land of Canaan. And they came unto Haran and dwelt there.

And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years, and Terah died in Haran.

[00:01:09] Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee. And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great, and thou shalt be a blessing. And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curses thee, and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken unto him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran. [00:02:04] And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran. And they went forth to go into the land of Canaan, and into the land of Canaan they came. And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sychem, unto the plain of Moreh.

And the Canaanite was then in the land. And the Lord appeared unto Abram and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land. And there builded he an altar unto the Lord who appeared unto him. And he rode from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east.

[00:03:04] And there he builded an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord. Amen. Now before we meditate on this passage, I'm going to ask you please for a further word of prayer. Lord, help thy servant tonight, we pray thee, to discharge the burden thou hast put upon his heart. Glorify thy name, and bless thy word, as we continue with worshipful hearts, saying amen to these prayers that have already risen to thee. Our eyes are up to thee, Lord, and we ask thee for thy blessing, in thine alone precious and worthy name. [00:04:01] It's laid on me tonight to speak a little about the call of God.

I'm conscious that it's a big subject, and with many New Testament ramifications.

But I thought tonight, if we limited ourselves to Abraham, who was the subject of the first public call of God, we might see in him certain principles that are a very great movement to our souls.

The story is quickly told.

He was in Ur of the Chaldees, lodged there, I might almost say embedded there. But the God of glory appeared unto him. [00:05:03] And we're told, aren't we, that he looked for a city which had foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

He was a stranger and a pilgrim in this world.

He had only his tent and his altar, a burying place.

But the comment of Scripture is concerning him, of him, of whom this world is not worthy.

Now of course all this has an application to ourselves. The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, has appeared unto us. We also look for a city, and more than that, may I say, the Father's house. We also are strangers and pilgrims in this world.

[00:06:03] And we're a spectacle, if not to men, at least to principalities and powers of the all-various wisdom of God. So I think tonight we might just profitably meditate on certain aspects of the life of Abraham.

I'd like first of all to try and fix this matter of the call in our minds. And with this in mind I bring forward a scripture from 2nd Timothy chapter 1 verse 9, which I'll quote to you. God has saved us, and called us with an holy calling.

Not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace. [00:07:01] The glad tidings that have reached us, you will see, have two parts.

Have saved us. And you just cannot be a Christian unless you know the blessedness of the first part. The burden of our sins rolled away.

We've stood before Calvary's cross, we've seen the Lord Jesus as our blessed substitute. The judgment of God has no terrors for us. The guilt of our sins has been dealt with by the precious blood of Christ. Every Christian can say he is saved. Hath saved us.

But we find here another element. Hath called us. And this is the bit I want to dwell upon a little bit tonight. [00:08:02] To be saved is a negative matter, a clear insight, a relief if you like. To be called involves very much more positive blessing from God.

Now not everybody is ready for this. It's very much easier to know that our sins are forgiven, and heaven is at the end of the journey, and just sink down here. To get through as best we can, to acknowledge God in his mercies, but virtually to live in this world. Now that isn't God's thought. God's thought is the core. And God's thought brings us into a sphere of blessedness and dignity, which I would like to dwell upon a little bit tonight. [00:09:05] It was my privilege over the holiday season to be

in a certain place where we had a Bible reading. It wasn't my suggestion. The thought was that we'd consider the verse in Ephesians 4 verse 1. Let me quote. I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called. Good scripture, good objection.

But the first question really engaged us for the whole of the hour and a half. And this was the question, what is the calling? So our minds had to be turned back to chapters 1 and 2.

And I would think in the Northeast, in Newcastle at least, it shouldn't be necessary to go over the points, [00:10:02] but I'll just stir up your pure mind by way of remembrance as to what that calling is. We consider chapter 1 verse 3, heavenly places. Every spiritual blessing, heavenly places. And then we look at verse 5, marked out for sunshine, glory with Christ above.

And then we consider verses 10 and 11, the inheritance, in the dispensation of the fullness of time. He will head up all things in Christ, whether they be things in heaven or things on earth, in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, the world to come. And then in verse 22 or 23, is it the body? Wonderful theme, isn't it? Just one of the scriptures bearing on the subject of the body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all. [00:11:06] And then we turn over to chapter 2 verse 15, and we consider the new man. Not Christ personally, but Christ characteristically.

This new creation, not Jewish, not Gentile, but a vessel adequate to set forth the features of Christ in this world, the new man. And then we consider verse 18, access by him, that is our Lord Jesus Christ.

We both, that is Jew and Gentile, have access by one spirit, the Holy Spirit, under the Father. Access, the highest privilege, perhaps, of this dispensation.

And then in the end of the chapter, about verse 23, is it the habitation of God through the Spirit. [00:12:09] We talked a little bit about the vocation. And however, can we exhort one another to walk worthy of the vocation if we don't know what it is? Now I have raised up this subject tonight because I have a very definite concern that we don't lose the sense of this vocation. I was speaking over this past weekend with some who were old enough to have listened to the ministry of Mr. Westcott. A brother, now old, was young then, but he heard Mr. Westcott speaking in Edinburgh, and Mr. Westcott said something that I thought was quite arresting. He said, Brethren, I'm wondering whether we have lost our sense of vocation. [00:13:06] Have we lost the heavenly calling? Have we lost the ministry? Now that was in his day.

Dearly beloved brethren, whatever may be the answers of that question, whatever might be the trends of the day, thank God the scriptures remain. And it's along these lines I'd like to dwell just a little bit tonight.

I'd like to look at Abraham under a few headings and just see if there aren't some points in connection with Abraham which might come home as being intensely relevant to ourselves.

Acts 7 tells us that God of glory appeared unto Abraham.

[00:14:03] Now, my dearly beloved brethren, don't you think we've got to remind ourselves that the only one who can dislodge the soul is God himself.

The era of the Chaldees, I suppose, was a wonderful civilization, and I use the expression that Abraham was embedded in it, but God dislodged him. And how did he do it? He did it by a word.

There came to his heart a word from heaven. He realized it was with God that he had to do, and he heard the call, and he responded to it. It is with God that we have to do.

Now when Abraham came out of the era of the Chaldees, what did he have? [00:15:05] What did he have when he came out of the era of the Chaldees? He went out not knowing whether he went. What did he have? So far as I can see, all that Abraham had was God's word.

And dearly beloved brethren, that's your position and mine.

We have nothing more and nothing less than God's word.

I've already quoted from Ephesians chapter 1, that we have the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, and the Apostle prays that we might know certain things, but so far as I can see, all that you and I have got is God's word. [00:16:01] In Philadelphia, you remember, it is said, thou hast kept my word, thou hast kept the word of my patience. Is the word enough?

Well if we receive it as the word of men, it's not enough. But the great Apostle says, even the great Apostle says, consider what I say, and the Lord will give the understanding in all things.

And I think, you know, that this is something that we've got to try and get a hold of, that the thing that really dislodges the soul is God's word alone, and God's word applied in the power, the mighty power of the Holy Spirit. I'm going to quote a little bit from the antecedent verses, the hymn that we had second tonight, [00:17:04] Blessed Lord thou speakest, t'was thy voice.

Remember, now this is one of Mr. Darby's hymns, and if you look up the spiritual songs, under the heading of the call, you'll find that there are antecedent verses. What are they? Well I can't put them all, and I don't think it's necessary for me to do so, but it sounds like this. What powerful, mighty voice, so near, calls me from this world apart.

Tis solemn, it soothes, it's his, yes, yes, tis his.

No other voice could move my heart like his.

Now, isn't this just what we're needing to try and capture afresh?

[00:18:01] A heart that hears the voice of Jesus.

Now in the past generation, there were hearts that heard this voice and responded, and may I say that the tremendous movement that was seen with Abraham, dislodging him from earth, was the tremendous movement that dislodged other souls from his world. In the past generation, professions, possessions, positions were given up. Why? Because they had the call before them. They had the sense that God was calling them to another world, and that voice, that voice alone, God's word, was enough to move them to really get souls going.

And that voice is available to you and me today.

[00:19:04] The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham.

Now it brought him in movement out of earth.

And if we've rightly heard the voice of Jesus, it's going to dislodge us from this world. Now I'd like to just dwell a little bit upon this. Don't let's be vague. We don't read a beat about the bush. Scripture describes the world in three ways.

There was the world that then was, that's the antediluvian world. There is the world to come of which we speak, the millennial reign of our Lord Jesus Christ. But there is the world that now is, the world that now is. Now in the chapters following nine in Genesis, [00:20:02] we learn the features of this world that now is. Government was set up in Noah.

What happened?

He couldn't govern himself. He got drunk and was debased.

Violence came in with Nimrod, mighty hunter before the Lord. Confederacy and self-exaltation in Babel, you remember?

Let us make us a name.

Joshua 24, we read, they served other gods.

And in 2 Peter 3, concerning this world, it's reserved under fire. Now those are the features of the world that now is. Government, topical isn't it? Man can't govern, can't govern himself.

Debased, yes, violence, confederacy, and self-exaltation.

[00:21:10] Idolatry, and I'm afraid we find written over this world, is under fire.

But it's out of this world that God calls Abraham.

Now it's very fascinating isn't it, that God here isn't described as the God of the world. No, God loves the world of course. But he's described as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. There's a call reaching Abraham, and God is content to name his name upon Abraham, the God of Abraham. And what is the word to Abraham? Get out.

His business is not to stay in error of the Chaldees and try and improve the nation, no. [00:22:09] Get out of thy country kindred father's house. Politically, socially, domestically.

We have seen that in error of the Chaldees there was idolatry. He isn't even told to give up his idolatry.

No, the claims of separation go deeper than that.

Deeper than that.

The claims of God's separation are thy country, thy kindred, thy father's house.

It is with God that we have to do. Not with country, not with kindred, not with father's house. The link between my soul is with God.

[00:23:04] And that is the measure, and the divine measure of separation.

Now this leads to the next point.

Abraham was blessed.

It's the separate man who is blessed. And Abraham is blessed in a threefold way.

I will bless thee.

Now we know very well that Abraham was the depository of unconditional promise.

We know that to him was given the sand, and the stars, and the dust.

You've enjoyed this in the northeast, the whole heavenly and earthly country. December, Israel, and the nations.

[00:24:01] Israel was blessed. Abraham was blessed. And he was a very remarkable man, Abraham. So far as I know, he's the only one called the friend of God. Abraham, my friend.

He was blessed.

May I just delay for a moment? Dearly beloved brethren, so and you are blessed. Blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. It's not only that we know certain things, Ephesians 1, but Christ dwells in our hearts, Ephesians 3. Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. In present blessed acceptance, we're able in the Spirit's power to be engaged with him. Our vision is filled with the coming glories. [00:25:02] And in the meantime, we enjoy the company of the Father and the Son on the way. Sonship.

Eternal life.

The top notes of blessing. We've been blessed. But that isn't enough.

Abraham is blessed in a second way.

I will make thee a blessing. Ah, that goes further, doesn't it? It's not only that we inherit a blessing, but we are a blessing. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, why?

The blessing reaches to the corners of the earth. And isn't this what we get in the New Testament? It is, you know.

It's not only that we're blessed. Acts 16, 31.

Thou shalt be saved and thy house.

[00:26:02] Exodus 2.

Father, mother, brothers, sisters, and all that they had. Obedient and the Lord blessed him and all that he had. God's blessing not only reaches the one who puts his trust in the Lord Jesus. His sins forgiven. God not only blesses him, but by extension, thou shalt be a blessing. And I think we can confidently claim that right to the close. Even Paul, a prisoner, what does he say? They of Caesar's household saluted.

Obviously a central blessing, even in those extreme conditions. The Christian is blessed, but the blessing reaches over the wall to us. And that's not enough. There's a threefold aspect of this blessing. I'm going to call it the protective aspect of the blessing. [00:27:04] Because God says to Abraham, you know, And I will bless them that bless thee, and I will curse him that curses thee. Serious, isn't it? Why does the man of God need this protective blessing? I'll tell you why.

He that departeth from iniquity maketh himself a prey.

We live in a day when the prophet is a fool, and the spiritual man is mad. But we need to be hedged about. And God sees to this Job chapter 1.

Even Satan has to acknowledge God has put a barrier around him, walled him. God's put a hedge about him, and his household, and all that he has. You just can't touch Job. You can't touch any other face of God without divine permission. [00:28:04] Notice that third blessing, dearly beloved.

I will bless them, plural, both bless. But I will curse him, individual, even one, taking up a contrary position, look out. I will curse him that curses thee. No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper, and every tongue that is raised in judgment shall falcon him. Well, Abraham is the man of faith.

He staggered not at the promise of unbelief.

Strong in faith, giving glory to God. He went out not knowing whether he went. And I think this is a wonderful word, here where God says to him, [00:29:01] I'm to the land which I will show thee, show thee. Ah, that's good, isn't it? I will show thee.

Elsewhere we know that the land of Canaan was a very delectable hill, a very delectable country. Wheat and barley, vines and pomegranates, oil olive, honey, a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarcity, thou shalt not lack anything in it. A good land, a very, very good land, flowing with milk and honey. I will show it unto thee.

Don't get it all at once, no. I will show it unto thee. And isn't that the pathway of faith? I ask my older brethren, isn't that the pathway of faith? Better as you go on? Fuller, richer, deeper, sweeter as the days go by. Yes, God has still got fresh disclosures to your heart and blind [00:30:07] if we're found walking in the steps of faithful Abraham.

It was to a man in separation that the word came, Lift up now thine eyes from the place where thou art, north, south, east and west. Have a look at it. And then the word says, Arise and walk through the

land. It's a good land.

Have a look at it. Walk through it. Unto a land that I will show thee.

And then we come to something that's just a little bit of a puzzle to some people. [00:31:03] And I will make thy name great.

God has in mind for those who are called, greatness.

Now this is always a difficult matter to handle.

The natural man grasps after greatness connected with this world.

Adam aspired to the Godhead and plunged down to hell.

But God proposes for the man who is called true greatness. And I thought we ought to try and understand this. The promise to Abraham was that in thee shall all nations of the world be blessed. We know from New Testament scripture, Galatians, that this promise is going to reach all nations in the sea. [00:32:03] Not the sea, but the sea, that is Christ. And God has in mind on the basis of his eternal purpose and counsel, that a new world will come into being in Christ. It's established in resurrection. This verse is also shown, brought forth to show, that blessing is going to reach you and me on the basis of faith.

And everyone who is called has a position of greatness in store for them. Let me try and make this clear. Those Corinthians, you know, weren't walking very well. They were raining before the time. But the Apostle is still able to say, even to those Corinthians who weren't raining, who weren't doing very well, what? Know ye not that ye shall judge angels? [00:33:04] Know ye not that ye shall judge the world? God has mapped out, again I say it, for those who are called a position of greatness. The Lord Jesus Christ exhibits perfectly this kind of greatness. It's a greatness on the other side of death. Man awarded to him the cross for grace. But God also has highly exalted him and given him a name that's above every name. He is great in every conceivable way.

A saviour who is a great one. A king, a great king. A prophet, a great prophet. King, he's a great king. In every wise you find greatness exemplified in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised. And his greatness is unsearchable. [00:34:03] Now God has in mind for you and me, a greatness which heaven can alone put upon us all.

Now this sort of greatness is the only greatness that's worth it. If you want to see this greatness shining through, before the day of display, I ask you in your mind, which I can't develop now, to just think of the two characters of Abraham and Lot. Abraham, he says in the 23rd chapter, on the occasion of the death of his wife, to the sons of Heth, I am a stranger and a sojourner amongst you. He is walking in the height and dignity of his calling. And what do the sons of Heth say to him? [00:35:02] Thou art a mighty prince amongst us. Turn your eyes on to Lot.

He pitched his tent towards Sodom.

Doesn't say he had any altar. And what happened in Sodom? He lost his testimony.

He lost his wife.

He would have debased his daughters. And he left a legacy to be a scourge to the people of God. Lot, my dear friends, he was a genuine soul, righteous Lot.

He was able to bring forth unleavened bread. But I'm afraid he lost the sense of the dignity of his calling. But, oh, what a wonderful thing that you and I have got the light of another world. [00:36:02] And there shines before us in all the luster of New Testament language the dignity of God's calling.

It's a high calling. It's a heavenly calling. It's a holy calling. It's a holy calling. Called unto holiness.

Called out of darkness into his marvelous light. Called unto suffering. Called unto glory. Called to the obtaining glory with our Lord Jesus Christ. Wonderful call.

Now as I draw to a close, I don't feel as if I would have discharged my burden in your presence tonight if I didn't also faithfully record [00:37:03] that there was one hitch, one real hindrance so far as the call was concerned. So far as the call was concerned. I've been rather taken up with this for some time, I must say, the danger of falling short of the inheritance. We know, so far as Israel, redeemed out of Egypt, is concerned, there were two and a half tribes didn't get into the land, remember? Numbers 32 verse 1, the tribes of Gad, Reuben and Gad, they had very much cattle.

And they came to these lands on the other side, Jordan, and they said, this is a place for cattle. [00:38:01] And they stopped short. They didn't get there. But I think in Genesis, you know, we get even more basic teaching. We get something even more fundamental than that. We read in chapter 11 verse 31, Tira took Abram.

Well now, surely that's a funny way to start, isn't it? Tira took Abram.

In verse 1, the Lord had said to Abram, when you turn to the seventh chapter of Acts, you find that the God of glory had appeared unto Abram. But here you find that it's his father who's taking the lead. Something wrong.

[00:39:01] Nature can be zealously affected in a right thing.

It can be mightily stirred, and it sometimes goes so far. But nature can't break with nature.

It's only the God of glory who can break with nature. And you find here that Abram got as far as to Haran, and he stopped there.

This, I think, is extremely solemn, you know, brethren. The first feature that is noticed in connection with falling short of the call is nature. And the dreadful thing here is that Abram was held up at Haran [00:40:03] until death removed Tira.

God isn't defeated. God will bring his people in, but nature has to die.

When you reach verse 5 of chapter 12, Abram took Sarai, his wife, and Lot, his brother's son. Ah, that's better. Now you find that the man, enriched with the divine call, takes the lead.

He's not being led by his father now. He's taking the lead. He takes Sarai, his wife, and he takes Lot. And what do we read in verse 5? They went forth to go into the land of Canaan, and into the land of Canaan they came. [00:41:03] I don't think I need add anything to the word of God. Here is the naked fact.

If nature takes the lead, who'll stop Haran?

When Abram takes the lead, they go forth to go into the land of Canaan, and into the land of Canaan. Now may we be marked by that. We live in the day when the waters are going out. Not now the freshness that marked the past generation. But thanks be to God, there is still the remnant. And I believe that word that we noticed early in this meditation, has still the same force and power to the remnant. And if the remnant is true to its core, [00:42:05] it'll walk in the steps of faithful Abraham. And I believe that the surprises, the delightful surprises that Abraham knew in the path of faith, will be the delightful surprises that we know in the path of faith, if we're found not disobedient to the heavenly vision. At the close of this, you know, I don't feel I can do better than quote the Apostle Paul. He was a man who was called.

You remember Galatians 1, called by his grace. And this call reached him in the ninth chapter of Acts. You remember the story, there was a light from heaven. By the time he was an older man, [00:43:04] he recurred in his mind to God's early dealings with him.

Acts 22.

And what does he say in his testimony? It was a great light from heaven.

And by the time in Acts 26, he's making his defense before Agrippa. At midday, O King, a light above the brightness of the sun. There you are, you see, the brightest light that nature could bring forward the sun. At midday.

Zenith, in tropical country, there came a light above the brightness of the noonday sun. And I think that's the testimony, you know, of those who've been on the road for a wee while. That the initial call of God fills you with increasing wonderment. [00:44:01] God is the God of Abraham.

And not only the God of Abraham, he's the God of those who are called. And I believe these little lessons that we see in Abraham come home to you and me as a definite encouragement.

And because he was such a bright example at the beginning.

May the Lord bless his word for his namesake.