

“The Lord’s Promises Lead Us”

What would it take to convince you to pack up and move? It just so happens that a few years ago, a real estate developer asked the pastors at Grace that very question. What would it take for us to sell this property and move out? Now, you can assume from the fact that we are gathered here worshipping that not a whole lot came out of that discussion. But it did give us a chance to think about a question that we had never really considered. We realize that church is not really about the building or necessarily about a location, since church is really the people. But we also knew that people appreciate this beautiful building and that there are definite benefits to this location. Our answer to the real estate developer was that it would take a lot to convince us to sell and move.

I’m guessing you probably haven’t thought a whole lot about that question, either. What would it take to convince you to pack up and move? For some people, it probably wouldn’t take a whole lot. Maybe it would be a steady job somewhere else. Maybe some are looking for a fresh start. And perhaps some just like the adventure of a change.

Others of us would be more reluctant. We wouldn’t want to leave behind a place with so many memories, a place so familiar to us. Some wouldn’t want to move away from family members and close friends. Some wouldn’t want to give up a job that they love and coworkers with whom they get along well. It would take a great deal to convince them to move.

But that hypothetical situation really doesn’t quite illustrate what faced Abraham in our sermon text today, from Genesis 12. I say Abraham, since that’s how most of us know him best, even though at the time of the events of our text, his name was Abram. Please don’t be surprised if I end up using both names at some points this morning. Abram, remember, lived at a time when there was no facebook, no text messages, no internet, no telephones, not even telegraphs that could send word back to family members. He lived at a time without Skype and video phones, so leaving his family behind meant that he may never see them again. Leaving them behind meant a long and arduous trip on foot, or at best on a pack animal. One would think that it would take a lot to convince a man like Abram to pack up and leave. But what if all it took was a promise? That would tell us something about the promise, wouldn’t it? It would tell us that the promise was a very impressive promise. It would also tell us something about the one who made the promise. Today we take to heart the account of Abram and realize that the Lord’s promises lead us as well.

The move talked about here in the first several verses of Genesis 12 was not actually the first move for Abram. Abram was born in Ur. Together with his father and others, Abram set out for Canaan, but stopped short in Haran. As we have heard, he later set out again, at the age of 75, and reached Canaan. And all of this moving around was done for only one reason: because the Lord said. As our text says, **“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.’”**

That direction also came with a promise, or really, several promises. The Lord went on, **“I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”** It was an impressive list of promises, indeed. Abraham would become the ancestor of a great nation. He would be blessed. His name would be great, and he would be a blessing. That blessing would extend to those who blessed Abram, but those who cursed him would be cursed. But all of these promises were connected to and depended on the final promise: that through Abram all nations on earth would be blessed.

That final promise was so incredible because it was the promise that not only Abram, but also the whole world needed. It was the promise that Abram relied on and the promise that we still rely on today. God had chosen Abram not because of anything that he had done, or any particular personal characteristic, but

only because of God's grace and mercy. Abram demonstrates abundantly on the pages of Scripture that he is a sinner: he often failed to trust God perfectly or to honor him. Yet God promised to bless the whole world through him.

And the whole world needed that blessing. The whole world is in the same condition as Abram. All people have fallen short of the glory of God. Yet God promises his blessing. This great blessing is a Savior from sin. He had already been promised to Adam and Eve. And now that promise was being passed down to Abram. Through him, and through his descendants the Savior would come. And based on that promise, Abram obeyed. He followed God's direction and was led to a strange new land, to live as a foreigner among the people there.

God hasn't necessarily called us to leave our homes and families to live in a foreign land, but Jesus has asked us to be willing to leave those things behind. He has asked us to honor him above all things in our lives. And it is his promise that leads us. His promise to us is that no matter the cost, following him as his disciple will be worthwhile. What else would make it worthwhile to carry our cross? What else would make it worthwhile for Abram to leave home and family?

Only this makes it all worthwhile: that God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him will not perish but will have everlasting life. He kept his promise to Abram, and he will keep his promises to us.

That's the other aspect of the promise for us to consider. The promise to Abram, a 75 year old man with a barren wife, was that he would become a great nation. From any other source that promise would have been ridiculous. It would have been impossible. But the promise was from the Lord. The maker of the promise is and was absolutely reliable and faithful.

Abram followed the Lord's promise, and he went to the land of Canaan. There Abram built altars, and he "called on the name of the Lord." Abram worshiped the one who made the promise.

We view that promise from a totally different perspective. We have been able to see on the pages of Scripture how God kept his promise. We have seen how God blessed Abraham and his wife Sarah with a son in their old age, and how that son had a two sons and how Jacob, one of those sons, became the father of twelve sons who later gave their names to twelve tribes of Israel. We have seen how out of the tribe of Judah came Jesus, born of a human mother according to all of the promises given, to be the Savior of the world. We have seen long odds and even impossible situations overcome because it was God who made the promise.

And we have heard his promises to us: promises to uphold us and keep us strong in faith, promises that because he lives and rose from the dead, we too will one day rise, promises that we will be with him in paradise forever.

Those promises ought to have a profound effect on our lives. Yet, all too often they don't. Jesus calls on us to carry a cross, but we would often rather take an easier way out. It's easy to sit in the church pews and to nod heads in agreement, but what happens when we're surrounded by others who do not believe? What happens when we are ridiculed or mocked? What happens when we have a prime opportunity to share with someone else the saving message of Jesus?

Abraham built altars and called on the name of the Lord. He didn't do these things so that God would love him. He did these things because God already loved him. He did these things because God had chosen him and called him to faith. He did these things because the one who had made him a promise was the one and only true and almighty God. And his example is one we ought to take to heart.

What does it take to convince someone to pack up and move? For us, there may be various answers. For Abraham, it took an amazing promise from a faithful God. Based on that promise, Abraham gladly went to the Promised Land. God has given us promises just as amazing, and based on them, we gladly face whatever comes our way. We carry our crosses until we arrive at our Promised Land.

Sermon Text: Genesis 12:1–8 (NIV84)

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 “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

⁴ So Abram left, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. ⁵ He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

⁶ Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷ The Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him.

⁸ From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord.