

The land that Abraham received by promise was more than just a piece of real estate. It was a pledge that one day God would reverse Adam's curse.

Brothers and sisters, Christ was cut off so that we might be brought in. He bore the curse upon the ground so that we might inherit the earth. So, Paul could write to the Ephesians that through faith we have, even now, every blessing in the heavenly places, because through faith we receive nothing less than Christ himself. Through faith, Christ is ours and we are his. And so strong is that bond between believers and their Savior that there is no power in heaven, or earth, or under the earth that can separate us from God's love. By faith, Abraham received blessing unimaginable, and grace undeserved. This is not to say that Abraham's obedience was optional. That it didn't matter that you obeyed God. It did matter. Abraham was called to obey God. He was obligated to obey God, but God's blessings were not based on Abram's obedience, just as eternal life is not based on our obedience, but on Christ.

Our text closes with an account of this very thing: that Abraham obeyed God. **This shows that faith not only break with the past, receives undeserved blessings, but through faith, we obey. We do not obey perfectly, but we can obey truly.** Abraham set out in obedience. Abraham left his family, his land, and his kindred. To a place that he didn't know. How long would it take? He didn't know. But faith that obeys is trusting God even when it doesn't know and can't understand how it is that God accomplish these promises.

God promised Abram that he would be a nation. How many children did he have? Zero. His wife was barren. It makes no sense. As he sets out, God promises to give Abram a good land, and the land experiences a famine. **These are God's ways; they often don't make sense to us. We can't comprehend them; we can't understand them. But this is the call of faith: to believe what we cannot see, and to obey God despite what we think or feel, because God's Word is true and we can stake our lives on it.**

This is the character of Christian faith: recognizing that God's ways and God's thoughts are higher than ours way and our thoughts. And recognizing that the call to faith often requires us to do something we would rather not do, to go to places we wouldn't have chosen, and to walk paths that we would rather have not walk. Paths that often seem dark and uncertain yet is particularly at moments like these that we learn that God's Word is surer than our thoughts, and God's promises are more trustworthy than our plans. The life of faith believes that God's word is true and good.

Father Abraham in this passage demonstrate great faith. As we sit and as we consider all that Abraham's obedience means, we discover that his faith was deep and profound. But we need to remember that Abram did not receive God's blessings because his faith was so deep and profound and neither do we. It is very important that we remember this: as Reformed Christians, when we say that we are saved by faith, this does not mean that our faith saves us. But our faith unites us to Christ, the Savior; Christ saves us. And He doesn't save us based on the strength of our faith, but because He is such a strong Savior.

We must remember that though Abram displays breathtaking faith in this passage, in the very next verses he demonstrates very weak faith when he presents his wife as his sister to Pharaoh. And this is Abraham's life: sometimes displaying great faith, and at other times remarkably weak faith. Does that sound familiar? If you're anything like me, that's our story as well. Do you ever feel that way? Someday you can trust God, you can walk with courage, and the very next day you are committing that same sin that has been set you all your life. **Thank God that we are not saved by our faith, but that we are saved by a faithful Savior! To whom we are united by faith, and in whom we receive every blessing in the heavenly places.** May God grant each of us just such a faith that clings tightly to our faithful Savior. Amen.



Kejadian 12:1-9

The older I get, the less I enjoy disruption. With every passing year, I find myself valuing routine, valuing familiarity, stability and perhaps above all, comfort. There is something comforting about knowing what to expect. Knowing what the day is going to hold, knowing what tomorrow is going to hold. We enjoy having security in our place in this world. And we love it when life lives along without surprises. Now, these realities: comfort, familiarity, stability are not wrong on themselves, but don't you see how they can quickly become idols? These gods can become idols that we will sacrifice a great deal to preserve. If they go unchecked, they will lead down the path of idolatry, which are: alienation, destruction and ultimately death. One way that I have discovered, is that we can challenge these idols. That is to place our faith in the true and living God.

The Christian life is fundamentally a life of faith. Paul would write to the Corinthian church, "For we walk by faith and not by sight." And what the Bible teaches us from beginning to end, what God tells particularly in this text, is that **the life of faith is not smooth, it's not predictable, and it's not always comfortable.** Repeatedly, in deeper and more profound ways life of faith finds itself disrupted. We are challenged and confounded by the God whom we worship and the Christ whom we love. Have you experienced this? The disrupting grace of God in your life. **As you follow Christ, you find that life is not predictable. It's often not comfortable and yet it's good.**

Abraham's story in Genesis 12 begins with such disruption. God breaks into his life and God says, "Get up and go to the land of Canaan." As God calls Abram to go to Canaan, we hear in God's call, a call to faith, a call to trust. What does it look like to live by faith? We are given a portrait of the life of faith in Abraham's calling. **And the first thing we see is that the call to faith is a call to break with our past.** Now, Hebrew is a sparing language.

The authors don't waste words. And when we remember this, we could then ask ourselves the question: why does God say to Abraham, go from your land, and from your father's house, and from your kindred? Why doesn't He just say go from your land? The answer is that God is calling Abram not only to leave a piece of real estate, but something so much more important. To leave his family, to leave his home.

Abram's home was Ur of the Chaldeans, and the Chaldeans is another name for Babylon. Think about the significance of Babylon in Scripture. Babylon is of course a place but it's much bigger than a place, isn't it? Throughout the Bible, Babylon stands as a symbol. It's a symbol of human opposition to God. Every major prophet in the Bible, prophesied against wicked Babylon. Because in all her wealth, power and pride, she has set herself against God. In fact, just one chapter earlier we read of the Tower of Babel. What was the tower of Babel? It was a monument to human wisdom, power and ingenuity, that stands opposed to God. And this was Abram's home; this was his culture.

Think about this: Abraham was shaped from his youth by Babylon. This means that Abram was an idolator. His life and his worship would have centred on the Pagan deities of Babylon. Likely, he would have honoured the moon goddess named Sin. And then in a variety of ways, given his life to the pantheon of Babylon deities. Do you see what God is calling Abram to do? When He calls him to leave behind his kindred, his family and his land, He was calling him to break with what he loved the most. To break with what gave him his identity. And with tradition that would have been incredibly costly for him to abandon. And yet these realities, the piety of his fathers, the nations, the gods of his nation. These gods to which Abram was devoted from his youth, these were the way of death. **God's call there was a call**

out of death into life, and so it is with us as well. The call to faith is a call to break with our past. Our past lives of sin, of self-reliance, and of self-worship. And with whatever idols have so entrapped our hearts. The call to faith, is the call from death to life. From serving ourselves in countless forms, to serving and to worshipping the one true and living God.

Such a break with a past, characterizes the beginning of every Christian life. Perhaps some of you can remember when you came to faith in Christ. That day when you turned from sin, from yourself and turn to God in faith and repentance. **But what we need to remember is the turning from sin and self are not just the call on the beginning of the Christian life, but it is the call of the daily Christian lives. This is to characterize every day of our lives.** Whether you have been a Christian for six months or for sixty years, the life of faith is the same. It consists of daily breaking with and turning from idols. These idols that make promises to us, promises of significance, promises of joy, pleasure and fulfilment. But in reality, they only deliver death and destruction. If we are honest, we can acknowledge that the life of faith is a difficult life, it's a difficult road. But we can be encouraged in the knowledge that it is a good life and a good road. Because it is a life in which our Saviour calls us. And it is the way in which our Saviour has gone ahead of us.

Jesus in fact characterizes this life, the life of faith, as a cross. You'd remember He said to His disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." He says, "Whoever will save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." The call to faith is a costly call. Though it will cost different people different things. The cost to me is not the same to you. And if we have time, we could go around the room, and all of us could share about the costs and crosses that the faith in Jesus Christ has asked us to bear. But we follow Christ in the sure knowledge of this. That the crosses that Christ asked us to bear, are perfectly suited for each one of us. God knows us. God created us for Himself. And the crosses which we bear are designed to sanctify each of us. The God

who loves us will not give us the wrong cross to bear.

This was Abraham's experience. It costs Abraham a great deal. To leave family and home, land and gods, to go where? He didn't know. What could possibly compel someone to make such a decision? To give up their lives, all that he had to this point lived for. God says you must be willing to give it all up, to treat your lives as of little worth. Perhaps even hate it. **What could compel us to make such a decision? Well, the answer is the inestimable worth and the life transforming power of God's grace.**

This leads us to the second point. Faith not only breaks with the past, but faith receives undeserved and unimaginable blessings. That's what God promises Abraham. He says, "I will make of you a great nation and I will bless you and I will make your name great, and I will make you a blessing." God is promising to bless Abraham with blessings that would have boggled his mind for their greatness. God is saying: "Yes, I'm calling you to leave your land, but I will give you a better land. Yes, I'm calling you to leave your family, but I am giving you a better family, a greater family. A family so great, it will be a nation." God promises to give Abraham a land; He promises to make him a great nation. But most amazingly of all, He promises to bless the entire world through him.

The call to faith is a call to give up much. A promise to die to ourselves, and yet God promises to give so much more. There is in fact nothing that we can give up in this life, that God cannot repay a hundredfold. Isn't this exactly what Jesus says in Mark 10:29-30? Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.

Notice that God simply declares his blessings to Abraham. They would have seemed too good to be true. And Abraham we know would settle for much less. You'll remember couple chapter later,

Abram makes this offer. He said a fact "Forget about nation things just give me one child." He said "I'll be happy with just one. Can you give me just one?" And how does God respond? Does he say Ok? No. He says, "Look at the stars. Your offspring will be more numerous than the stars of the heaven and the sands of the sea."

Brothers and sisters, God's goodness is not limited by our imagination. But what we think is reasonable or possible, God's goodness is infinite and his grace is determined only by the counsel of his will. Why Abram? Was it because Abram was so good? We're not given any reason why God called Abram. But we can know this: God did not call Abram because Abram was so very godly. Abram was an idolater. God did not call Abram because Abram was so very moral. Abram as you see in the very next passage, was a sinner. He needed God's grace and forgiveness.

Why did God call Abram? God promises good things to Abram as a gift, undeserved, unmerited. It is critical to see these that God doesn't make these blessings conditional on Abram's behaviour. God's grace towards Abraham was unconditional. His grace towards us is unconditional. **The posture of faith then is not of doing, but of receiving. Through faith we receive blessings that we could never earn. Even if we were given a thousand lifetimes and a million chances, not one of us could by our own works and efforts earn God's favour and God's blessing.** And yet praise God that He freely gives what we could never earn. He promises us eternal life. He promises us new heavens and a new earth. He promises us a Savior. He'll deliver us from our sin.

God promise to give Abram a land was not simply about a piece real estate in the eastern Mediterranean. That land represented something so much greater. It was a sign or a pointer to a new creation reality: a new heaven and a new earth. This is what the author of the letter to the Hebrews tells us in Hebrews 11:8-10, that Abraham was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. Abraham understood that this land was but a shadow of a far greater land, a far greater country, a far greater kingdom—a kingdom that is established by God. In contrast to those who built a kingdom for themselves and for their name like

Babel, God calls Abraham to give up his kingdom, to give up his name, because God will give him a new name, a new kingdom.

Who are these descendants of Abram who will become a great nation? Is it those who are physically descended from Abram? No. The great nation whom God promised to Abram is you and me. Have you ever thought of that? That we are the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham. What is the nation that God promises to Abram? Not those who share Abraham's DNA, but those who share Abraham's faith. That's you and me and all who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ. These blessings that God promises to Abraham are not ultimately fulfilled in Israel, be it the land or Israel the people, but they are fulfilled ultimately and centrally in the true Israel: the Lord Jesus Christ. Ultimately the one whom Abraham trusted, the one whom Abraham received by faith was none other than Christ himself.

God's promise to Abraham of offspring, it places Abraham in the larger narrative of redemptive history. And this is a history that begins with a promise to a woman that her offspring, her seed, will one day triumph over evil. As it was said in Genesis 3:15, And God said to the serpent, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall crush his heel." Abraham would be the father not only of innumerable believers, but he will also be the father of that one seed, the promised seed, who would crush the head of the serpent. The promised champion who would deliver his people from their sin. Abraham's offspring, like Abraham himself, would receive God's blessing because Jesus would bear the curse, the curse that they deserve and that we deserve.

In Adam, that blessed land was lost. The doors to Eden were closed, the ground was cursed, and the man was driven east into exile. But to Abraham was promised a land of blessing, freely and unconditionally—not because he earned it, but because of Christ, Abraham's greater Son. Christ would one day be cut off from the land of the living in Abraham's place and in ours.