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Preacher: Reverend David MacLeod

[0 : 00] In the charms of fears, that bids our sorrows cease, that bids our sorrows cease, tis music in the sinner's ears, tis life and health and peace, tis life and health and peace.

He breaks the power of counseled sin, he sets the prisoner free, he sets the prisoner free.
His blood can make the foulest clean, his blood availed for me, his blood availed for me.
He speaks and listening to his voice, you life the dead receive, you life the dead receive.
The mournful broken hearts rejoice, the humble poor believe, the humble poor believe.

[1 : 58] Hear him, he death, his praise he done, your loosened tongues employ, your loosened tongues employ.

Heal like behold, your saviour come, and leave healing for joy, and leave healing for joy.
My gracious master and my God, assist me to proclaim, assist me to proclaim, to spread through the earth abroad, the honours of thy name, the honours of thy name.

It's good to have Josh leading us tonight as well, and Angus. We got kind of used to Josh when we were in lockdown. Somebody said to me this morning, was that the man from the television that was actually singing in the church today?

So, yeah, it's good to have you. We don't really consider you visitors anymore, but it's good to have you with us. Returning now to Genesis chapter 12.

[3 : 54] Well, Genesis 11, actually, we'll read in from verse 27 of Genesis 11. And we'll read down to verse 9 of chapter 12.

This is the account of Terah. Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran. And Haran became the father of Lot.

While his father Terah was still alive, Haran died in the land of his birth. Abram and Nahor both married. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai.

And the name of Nahor's daughter was Milca. She was the daughter of Haran, the father of both Milca and Isca. Now, Sarai was barren. She had no children.

Terah took his son Abraham, his grandson Lot, son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram.

[5 : 07] And together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there. Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Haran.

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. 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.

So Abram left as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was 75 years old when he set out from Haran. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, to all the possessions there accumulated, and the people there acquired in Haran.

And they set out for the land of Canaan. And they arrived there. Abram traveled through the land, as far as the site of the great tree of Mori at Shechem.

[6 : 11] At that time the Canaanites were in the land. 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.

From there he went on towards 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.

Then Abram set out, and continued towards the Negev. Amen. And may God bless that reading of his word to us. We're going to sing again now to God's praise.

And we'll sing from Psalm 84, from verse 3 down to the end of the psalm. It's a double tune, which you know well, and I think that means that we repeat the last stanza, verse 12, and you'll see the

words there on the screen.

We'll stand now to sing to God's praise. Amen. Behold a sparrow, find it thou, can thou swim to rest.
[7 : 25] Thus, the sparrow also for herself, hath purchased said an end.

In thine or altars, where she say, her young ones forth may bring.

O thou almighty Lord of hosts, who art my God and King.

Blessed are they in thy house and dwell, they ever give thee praise.

Blessed is the man who sent the word, in whose heart are thy grace.

[8 : 24] who passed in third, who make us still, therein new day of wells.

Also the rain that falleth down, the pools with water fill.

So they from strength and weary go, shall forward unto strength.

Until it's time of day appear, before the Lord at the land.

Lord God of hosts, Lord God of hosts, my prayer here, O Jacob's God, give ear.

[9 : 20] See God, our shield, look on the face of thine anointed dear.

For in thy courts, one day excels, a thousand rather rain.

My God's house will I keep adore, that dwell in tents of sin.

For God the Lord's, the sun and shield, He'll grace and glory give, and will withhold no good from them, that are right free to live.

O thou that art the Lord of hosts, that man is truly blessed, who by assured confidence on thee alone will rest.

[10 : 40] For God the Lord's, the sun and shield, He'll grace and glory give, and will withhold no good from them, that are right free to live.

Let's unite their hearts again in prayer as we come back to God's word. Our Heavenly Father, once more we thank you for your word that we have sung, and we have read, and now that we come to study, and we pray that you would open it up to us, and that you would open us up to the word.

We ask Lord that you would stir our hearts, we pray that you would declutter our minds from all that would distract us. We pray that you would cleanse us from sin.

We pray that you would take that from us, the sin that so easily entangles us. We pray that you would empty us of self, because we confess that we are so prone to turn back to thinking about ourselves.

Help us, we pray, in this time to focus our minds and our hearts on the one true God, and that as we go through these verses, that we would see more of your glory, and that we would see more of your grace, and that we would see more of the need that we have for you every hour.

[12 : 28] We thank you that as we come seeking that grace, as we come seeking to draw near to you Lord, you never push us away, you never drive us back, but you give to us the grace and the forgiveness that we seek when we pray in Jesus' name.

We ask Lord that you would be with all who are here tonight. You know our hearts, you know our minds, you know the things that trouble us, you know the things that we seek direction in, and we pray for that Lord, that you would meet us at the point of our need.

We thank you Lord for the fact that you are always faithful, that you are always with us, and just as you led Abram and drew near to him, that you come to us, you seek, and you save us as we look to you, and you lead us in the direction that you would have us go.

We thank you for the reassurance that gives. We pray for the young ones who are here. We pray Lord for those who may be coming towards the end of school years, and who wonder which path to go in terms of career, and subject choices, and we thank you that even in the details of our lives in these matters, we can seek wisdom that comes from heaven, and not from us.

So we pray Lord for the young ones, that they may know your wisdom, and that your guidance may be given to them as they acknowledge you. We pray for those who are students, those who have graduated, those who prepare to start new jobs, and we ask that you would equip them also, that as some of them go out into the workplace for the first time, we ask that you would enable them to do all things as unto the Lord, and to be salt and to be light in the places that you have positioned them.

[14 : 29] Help us to remember that, whatever we are, whatever we're doing, that we are ambassadors for Christ, and that our conversation, if we are Christians, is to be seasoned with the salt of the gospel.

Enable us to remember that we are not here by some strange coincidence. It was to remember that every day that we are given is not something that is randomly selected, but you are the God who makes the day.

You are the God who gives us life. So help us, we pray, to remember that our chief end is to glorify you, and there is joy eternal as we make that our purpose.

We pray for those who are absent tonight. We think of those especially who have a desire to be with us, but who can't be, those who are ill. We think of many as they come into our mind's eye.

We pray especially for Neil Cameron tonight, whom we have received such blessing through as he greets us at the door of the church over the years.

[15 : 35] We pray that as he struggles with his health at this time, that you would lay your hands of healing upon him. We pray that you would increase his strength. We pray that he would know that you are with him in the home with Ketak, where he is just now.

And we pray, Lord, that if it's your will, that you would bring him back to this place in your time, that we may know the blessing of being together with each other.

We pray that you would be with him and with all who are like him, who are willing, but who are not able to get out at this time. And we pray for others who may be able, but who are not willing, whose minds and hearts and lives are so busy with other things that the priority of being in your house drops.

You know, Lord, our lives. You know where there are things that make it impossible for us to be in your house. And you know also, Lord, where there is an apathy.

And we do not and we cannot, we must not judge each other, but we pray for each other. And we ask that you would keep us close to you, that you would enable us to walk near to you.

[16 : 54] Oh, for the closer walk with God that we'll sing of at the end of the service. May that be each of our portion. So hear our prayers, take away our sin.

And once more, we pray that you would help us as we turn to your word. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, if you've got your Bibles open at Genesis 12, you'll find that helpful.

Tonight we're continuing our study through the life of Abraham. Abraham. I find it hard to say Abraham. He becomes Abraham.

But we're looking at Abraham at this stage. And specifically tonight, we're looking at his faith, Abraham's faith.

So who was Abraham? In case you weren't here last Sunday evening or are a bit unclear. Well, Abraham was just an ordinary man as we find him.

[18 : 02] And he's living in a pagan land. We're told by Joshua that he was a worshiper of other gods. He wasn't a seeker of God.

He wasn't someone who was looking for God. But he's far away from God with no knowledge of the one true God. And God seeks him out. He draws near to him.

He shows him great grace and great mercy. And in that great love that we thought about this morning, God calls Abraham to follow him.

And he promises to bless him. And he promises to bless many others through him. But the call that's placed on Abraham's life is a call to believe.

Abraham was called to a life of faith. So tonight, with Genesis 12 open in front of us, I want to just look at the beginnings of Abraham's life of faith.

[19 : 12] But before we even go there, let's just take a moment to define the word faith. And we don't need a dictionary to define the word faith because the word faith is defined for us in the Bible.

Hebrews 11 verse 1 says, Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

So Abraham, he's given promises. He's given assurances by God of things that he cannot yet see or feel or touch or reach.

But he's called to live by faith, focused on these things and the God who made the promise.

And we see Abraham persevering in faith. I think a good illustration of this actually occurred to me as I think back on yesterday.

[20 : 17] Yesterday, Angus decided to go to the Shants and Josh and Gordon and I and Angus headed off in the direction of the Shants.

Now, when we left Tarbert, it was quite clear and sunny. But as we got out past the Scalpy Bridge and out into open sea, this eerie kind of fog rolled in.

And before we knew it, you could see virtually nothing. So we're sailing. I'm sitting there somewhat nervously. I would just about trust him with a needle.

I wasn't sure I trusted him with a rib. And we were sailing along and no visibility, heading for the Shants. And it must have been 60 metres before we actually saw these towering rocks that were over our heads.

So I suppose from Angus's point of view, he's there with a chart and tech on some screen. But in terms of visibility, there's nothing.

[21 : 33] You're going by faith that that tech works and the man in the front knows how to read it. So Abram had faith. And I want to just look at faith at work in these verses.

And there's there's four things. And the first thing is that Abram trusted God's word. And the second thing we'll see is that Abram, as he trusts God's word, he he takes people with him on this journey of faith.

The third thing is Abram travels with God. And the final thing we see here is that Abram travels light. So that's the structure of our thoughts this evening.

The first thing then is Abram, he trusts God's word. So what had God said to Abram? What promises, what assurances had God given to Abram?

Well, we're giving them in verse 2 and verse 3. God says to Abram, 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.

[22 : 41] I will bless those who bless you. And whoever curses you I will curse. And all people on earth will be blessed through you. And I'm not going to focus too much on these words.

We looked at them last Sunday evening. But we can see, we can hear that God's word, God's promises to Abram, they're immense.

They're huge. And if you're anything like me, when somebody comes and knocks on your door or pings you an email and there's an offer, there's some promises, there's some amazing opportunity that is available to you, some great insurance policy, some free holiday, when something great is offered to us through someone we don't really know, then we tend to listen.

But we regard the offer with great suspicion. But what we see here is that Abram didn't treat these words of God with great suspicion.

He listened and he believed. Abram trusted the God that he did not yet very well know.

[24 : 04] Abram trusted God's word. And just look at the simplicity of Abram's faith. Verse 1, 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.

Skip forward to verse 4 and it says, So Abram left as the Lord had told him and Lot went with him. Abram was 75 years old when he set out from Haram.

You know, it's so simple and straightforward and yet for Abram this is such a huge step. The promises of God in terms of human eyes must have seemed so far-fetched and yet Abram believed.

He trusted God and he obeyed God. And he could have made excuses. He could have said, I'm 75 years old.

I'm 10 years past retirement. This is the time to settle down. Not pack up and head off to some land that I don't know where it is. Or Abram could have doubted the credibility of God's promise to make him into a great nation.

[25 : 25] We read from the end of chapter 11 and at the end of chapter 11 verse 30 we are told that Abram's wife Sarah she was barren.

She was unable to have children. And Abram's 75 years old. So this was medically speaking virtually impossible.

But yet when we look at Abram and when we listen to him there's no excuses. There's no audible doubts. He trusts the word of God and he proceeds.

Eveson the commentator says biblical faith is not a leap into the dark. It is trust in God and his word. And that's what we're called to do. It's what Abram was called to do and that's what we are all called to do. No matter what age we are we're called to trust God.

[26 : 38] We might be here and we're approaching or we've exceeded age 75 and it tends to be that the longer we resist God the harder our hearts get the less likely we are actually to trust him.

And yet if there's someone here or at a distance tonight listening in and they haven't yet trusted God even if you're up in years now is the time.

As it says in Psalm 95 today if you hear his voice don't harden your heart again. no matter how old no matter how young we are because we have some very young ones here tonight you can never be too young to trust God and no matter how impossible or how challenging the call of God might seem when it comes to some things that he may call us to are calling us to trust him and no matter how little we might know about God or the Bible because I often hear people saying well I'd like to become a Christian but I don't know enough.

Abraham knew next to nothing he just heard the call of God and he left his old life and he followed God he trusted God's word so faith as we see it in Abraham Abraham trusted God's word that's the first thing the second thing is Abraham took people with him we read that in verse 5 he took his wife Sarai his nephew Lot all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran and set out for the land of Canaan and they arrived there so Abraham he's not on his own as he sets out the call of God comes to Abraham but he as he responds he doesn't travel alone now when we think about our culture in the

UK today faith is considered to be such a private thing and we may have our faith and people are okay with us having our faith or they are almost okay with us still having our faith but when we sometimes seek to share faith the response we'll often get is well you have your faith that's fine for you I don't want to hear about it I don't want to know about it keep it out of my years keep it out of my workplace keep it out of my school keep it out of my area it's personal to you keep it private I don't want to hear about it and that's the culture that we're in and the danger that we have is that we we can start to buy into that we can start to withdraw when we're actually called to be those who share our faith and who seek to take people with us as we trust and as we follow Jesus don't become one of these parents who sits down with your six year old and says would you like to go to church tonight or would you rather stay at home just take them with you and there's such encouragement as we see that happening here if I had been given the option when I was a young kid do you want to go to church tonight or not that

[30 : 26] I'd probably been done by age five but I can remember age ten the night when I told my dad and I've told you this before I don't think I'll go tonight you know the minister uses big words I get quite bored I think I'll just stay at home tonight and he said that's very interesting get in the car he just took me with him and that was the night that God spoke in power into my life and I think the encouragement I know there are circumstances where it's not possible I know there are all kinds of nuances but our calling is to seek to take people with us in our family our friends we want to take people with us in terms of faith in Jesus Abraham didn't we don't have a verse where Abraham says he called a family conference he said you have to make up your minds about these things

I don't want to influence you one way or the other no he believed enough to say to the people he loved you need to come with me you need to leave your old life as well you need to trust this God too today on on YouTube and Instagram and these sort of social media platforms there are people who call themselves influencers that's a title that they've given themselves it's one of the big money making things today there are professional influencers so you see them being interviewed on TV what do you do I'm a social media influencer really they're trying to they have followers and they sort of compete with each other with the number of millions of followers they have and they try to influence your life in different directions whether it's home decor or diet or fashion style or whatever well you could say that

Abram was an influencer long before YouTube but he was an influencer in something that really mattered he was an influencer in the area of faith and if we're Christians are calling are calling is to be witnesses to Jesus to be influencers for Jesus are calling us to be those whose lives and words encourage people to follow the Lord and not just the people we like you know there are some people we like some people we love we dearly want them to follow the Lord and there are people who just annoy us and if they're at a distance from us we're okay with that we find them meditating but if we're Christians are calling is to reach out not just to the people that we get on with but also the people that we struggle to get on with the people that we find difficult notice the name Lot so Abraham left verse 4 as the

Lord had told him and Lot went with him verse 5 he took his wife Sarai and his nephew Lot so twice we're told it was actually pointed out to me at the door it kind of went over my head twice we're told that Abram he took Lot with him just so we won't miss it and for those of us who know the life of Abram we know that Lot was not going to be an easy guy to take with him Lot was quarrelsome Lot was selfish there was going to be a whole lot of trouble ahead because of Lot and likely Abram

knew the kind of person Lot was but still he reached out to him he stuck with him he took him and I think we see something of God's grace there

God's grace is such that he reaches out to those us who are not worthy of his grace God's grace is such that he takes hold and he keeps hold of those who are not worthy of it so we should be constantly giving thanks to God for the grace that he has shown towards you as I have to give thanks to God for the grace that he has shown towards me and also we are to if we are Jesus followers we are to be those who make sure that the grace that we have received we also show to those that God has put around us Abraham he took people with him it's the second point the third point is Abraham travelled with

[36 : 03] God verse 6 Abraham travelled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Mori at Shechem and in verse 6 and throughout the life of Abraham there's a sense of movement the word there used as travel in verse 6 in the NIV I think in the AV in the ESV it's it's passed over I can't quite remember some people are nodding but there's that sense of movement nothing stationary here there is movement to have faith in God to be living the life of faith is not to be standing still it's not to be standing still but it's to be going on it's to be traveling on with the Lord we are species if I can read my writing here

God kept Abraham moving so that he would meet new challenges and be forced to trust God for new grace in his time of need comfortable Christianity says we are speaking is the opposite to the life of faith so Abraham he's traveling with God there's that sense of movement and that's something that we see all through the Bible it's something that we should be able to see in all of our lives if we're Christians when we hear a testimony it's good to hear of the moment or the season where someone came to faith and we always hear that in the testimony we get some of the back story of the life and we get that story of how gradually or how very suddenly someone realizes their need calls upon the name of the Lord and is saved and that's where a testimony begins but it's only the beginning a testimony is the story that of how we walk with

God how we travel with God it's always evolving it's always going on and that's the picture that we have here and it's the picture that runs all the way through the Bible God is calling Abraham to follow him to travel with him the descendants of the children of Israel as we think about them they travel with God through the wilderness to the land that God promised or think about the disciples Jesus he comes to them he calls them and he calls them to follow him to be with him and to follow him there's movement so that's our calling we're called as the hymn goes to walk with the Lord we're called to travel with the Lord through life by faith will that be easy and smooth no it won't be there may be seasons where we we feel that we are in the terrain of green pastures and still waters but there is all kinds of terrain as we follow

God and Abraham found out very quickly that things will not always be easy I mean think about him and what was going through his mind he has this amazing promise of this land that God is going to give to his descendants and Abraham is en route to this land to this home we can imagine the sense of excitement as he travels on as God leads but what's the first thing that Abraham saw when he actually entered the land well we're told in verse 6 at that time the Canaanites were in the land so Abraham knocks on the door of this dream house that he's been promised and it's occupied the Canaanites are in the land Abraham takes his family he takes all his stuff to the land that God shows him and it's occupied it's full of these unwelcoming

Canaanites one of the commentators describes them as wicked and violent people and you can go through the Bible and do a search and see some of the wickedness and some the violence they weren't slow to swing the sword so we can imagine the sense of dismay and perhaps even confusion as Abraham gets to this land and thinks I can't settle here and yet in that moment of confusion God in his kindness he appears to Abraham and he gives him reassurance of that same promise he says trust me the Lord verse 7 appeared to Abraham and said to your offspring I will give this land and this is something which we will all experience in the life of faith as we run the race to use the illustration that

[41 : 39] I an used last Sunday morning we'll find as we run that there are hurdles on the track that we didn't know were on the track as we approach them we have no idea how we're going to get over them sometimes as we follow God in the way we'll get to junctures where we're confused and we're dismayed and we don't know what to do so what do we do well we do what Abram did and what did he do well he looked to God he didn't look at the land he didn't look at the Canaanites he looked to God as God appeared to him and he listened to God as God spoke to him so that's what

we're to do we don't expect a theophany we don't expect that we're going to have an audible voice in our ears although some have we have the

Bible we have the word of God and we see who Abram did not yet see we see Jesus the word made flesh the image of the invisible God and so it's as we see God as we fix our eyes upon Jesus as we hear the voice of God and make sure that our voice our minds our hearts are filled with the Bible and not all the rubbish the white noise that's around us in this world it's as we see God and hear God that we are enabled to keep on trusting him and to keep on going as Abram did and the final point is Abram travelled light he travelled with God and he travelled light I think it was Max Locado we've got an expert there in the congregation who wrote the book entitled Travelling Light yeah Abram now he's travelling light remember when we looked at him last week we see that for a while Abram got stuck in Haran he gathered quite a lot of stuff he employed quite a lot of staff he became way too comfortable but now Abram is travelling light he goes from Shechem we're told to the hills east of Bethel but he doesn't when he arrives there call the builders in immediately and tell him to get going on this new deluxe house to make him comfortable in that location in fact he doesn't even invest in a top of the range motor homes that his travel will be comfortable and will be stylish Abram in this period of transit verse 8 he's content to pitch a tent he's travelling light and here we see a preview of the life of

Jesus he is the God man the son of God the one who who made all things the one who owns all things the one who holds all things together and yet whilst in this world remember what Jesus said he had no place to call his home Matthew 8 20 Jesus said foxes have dens and birds have nests but the son of man has no place to lay his head now this doesn't mean that we should be those who resist buying a house but I think the point that we're to take in here is that as we travel through this world we are to travel light we're told in Hebrews 13 14 we have no continuing city here but we seek one to come so

Abraham he he builds no house he he commissions no city to be built in his name that would draw attention to himself rather he pitches a tent and he builds altars that draw attention to God he builds no home for himself but he builds two altars for God verse seven and eight so he built an altar there to God to the Lord who had appeared to him from there he went on towards the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and the east there he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord and when you think about that as Abram he built these altars that took great courage we're told by the commentators that the site verse six of the great tree of more at

[46 : 53] Shechem that was thought to be a pagan sacred spot that was thought to be a place where there was teaching in false gods so Abram when he arrives there he doesn't say oh well this is obviously a holy place for other gods and other people I better avoid this he gets there and he immediately marks it out for God the one true God would that antagonize the people almost certainly would it put his life in danger almost certainly but he does it Dale Ralph Davis says Abram doesn't mesh with the local liturgy he worships Yahweh only and openly no multi-faith movement we see a trailer for

John 14 6 way back in Genesis 12 and again as you think about the altar that was the place where sacrifices were made and all these sacrifices point us to Jesus so again we're given a preview we're given a pointer to Jesus the Lamb of God whose life would be laid on the altar of the cross for us so that we could be saved so Abraham he he travels light pitches a tent and he builds the altars and Debra F.

Davis he says tent and altar characterize Abraham's life tent speaks of his life as a pilgrim often on the move while altar speaks of him as a worshiper tent indicates he sits light on circumstances altar that he holds fast to the essential I think that's a good picture for us to take away with us tonight what what do we need as those who are seeking to live by faith what do we need if we are those who are traveling with God well we need a tent just a tent where we rest for a while and wait on the Lord's leading at these points in life where we're not sure which way to go and we need an altar where daily we worship the

God the one true God who is worthy of our praise verse 9 then Abraham set out and continued towards the Neheph so as we close the chapter tonight we see Abraham and he's traveling on with the Lord and that is an encouragement for us to do the same to walk close with God and we'll sing about that as we close now 494 and mission praise to close oh for a closer walk with God a calm and calm and empty frame a light to shine upon the road that leads me to the land where is the

blessed

I knew when I twice saw the Lord where is the so refreshing view of Jesus and his word what peace for ours I once enjoyed how sweet their men be still but they have left a making void the world can never fail return o holy love return sweet messenger of rest

[52 : 20] I hate the sins that made thee mourn and drove thee from my breast the dearest idol I have known whatever that idol be help me to tear it from thy throne and worship only so shall my love be close with God come and share in my faith so pure light shall mark the road that leads me to the love and

I may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with us all now and forever more Amen