

21.8.22 pm

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Date: 21 August 2022

Preacher: Reverend David MacLeod

[0 : 00] Good evening, and a warm welcome to the service this evening. We're going to begin this time of worship singing to God's praise in Psalm 40.

Psalm 40, the last two verses of the Psalm, verses 16 and 17. In thee let all be glad and joy, who seek and thee abide, who thy salvation love, say still the Lord, be magnified.

I am poor and needy, yet the Lord of me a care doth take. Thou art my help and saviour, my God notary make. These two verses of Psalm 40 we sing in Gaelic, and after we've sung in Gaelic, John McSween will lead us in prayer in Gaelic, please.

■■ me Thank you.

Thank you.

[1 : 58] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[4 : 28] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[6 : 58] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[9 : 28] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[11 : 59] Amen.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[14 : 28] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[16 : 58] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[19 : 28] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[21 : 58] Thank you.

that we would be, when we come to you.

We have no interest.

on the things.

that you call us.

[24 : 58] Thank you.

And we take us, we know, blue or 3. It's good to see all of you. It's good to see some of the younger ones with us tonight.

And I want to ask a question just to start with. And the question is, have you ever been on a roller coaster? Put your hand up if you've ever been on a roller coaster.

So we've got Ailey, we've got Lois, and we've got Gordon along there at the end. Anyone over there been on a roller coaster? No? Okay.

Those who've been on it, did you enjoy it? There's a lot of hesitancy. Hesitation is the right word, not hesitancy, that's the American word.

[26 : 45] I've been on a roller coaster and I can tell you, I did not enjoy it. Have you ever been on the ferry on a rough day? Did anyone enjoy that?

Well, I certainly don't enjoy that either. Ever been in a bumpy flight where the wind is blowing and you can feel the plane going from side to side and you're thinking, how on earth is this going to land?

And it lands with a big thud as you pray earnestly that it will hit the tarmac without too much force. There's nothing very comfortable or predictable about being on a roller coaster ride or on a rough ferry or on a bumpy plane.

But thinking about the roller coaster especially, I remember creeping up the steep, steep slope, not enjoying that as you feel yourself going backwards.

And then you get to the tip and then it shoots down at a rate of knots down the other side. And you don't enjoy that either because your stomach's still at the top of the hill.

[27 : 55] And you're going round corners and you're hanging on for dear life and sometimes they take you through kind of water things. And you're getting soaked. And you're getting soaked.

There's nothing pleasant in my view about a roller coaster ride.

There's nothing comfortable. There's nothing predictable about it. But as we track here with Abram in his walk with God, as he begins to follow God, I think it's fair to say that for Abram, it was much more like a roller coaster ride than it was like a smooth Sunday afternoon drive.

And when we follow the Lord, if we are those who are following the Lord, we can expect this.

Sometimes people say, well, you know, if we follow Jesus, life's going to be smooth, calm, peaceful.

But that's not what the Bible teaches us. If we are following Jesus, we can expect that there will be things that challenge us. There'll be many challenges.

There will be things sometimes that worry us when we see them coming at us. There will be things that sometimes throw us off course. So when we're following the Lord, if we're following the Lord tonight, we can expect that there are always lessons to learn.

[29 : 34] Some of you are beginning to learn to drive. You've got the L plates on the car. We're going to have that coming to our house soon as well. I can hardly believe it, but it's true.

And when you're learning to drive, the L plates are on the car. But as we follow the Lord Jesus, the L plates come on to our lives and they never actually come off.

Because we're always having to learn lessons in the school of faith. And I want to think tonight about four lessons that Abram had to learn as he takes his first few steps on the road of faith.

And the first lesson that Abram has to learn is that the Lord will provide. Second lesson is the Lord will protect. The third one is the Lord will preserve.

And the final lesson is that the Lord will persevere. With us. So these are the lessons that Abram has to learn.

[30 : 43] And he learns them all the hard way. I remember a football coach that I had when I was in primary school. And he used to say regularly to us about football.

There's a hard why to play and there's an easy why to play. And you boys are playing at the hard why. And he would talk about throwings. You take the throw and you pass it to your mate. He passes back to you. And then the game progresses. You don't throw the ball up the pitch and then have a fight, a tackle to try and keep possession. You guys are doing it the hard why. And Abram, what we see here is he often has to learn the lessons that God teaches him the hard way. So the first lesson is the Lord will provide. Look at verse 10 of chapter 12. And it says there, now there was a famine in the land.

So what land is this? Well, this is the land that God called Abraham to go to. The Lord came to Abraham. He spoke to Abraham.

[31 : 53] He said, I want you to follow me. I'm going to take you to a land that I'll show you. And so Abraham, he gets to the land. And the first thing he finds is that there are big ugly Canaanites there who are not very happy to see him.

And the second thing he learns is that there's a famine in the land. So all is not going very well. Sometimes if you switch on the TV, I wouldn't recommend you do this.

But if you've got Sky TV, there's all these Christian channels somewhere in the plethora of channels. And you don't have to flick through the channels for long until you come across what's known as the prosperity gospel heresy.

And the message generally is, follow God, trust in Jesus, and your life will be happy and healthy. You'll be wealthy. You'll be healthy. And it's a lie.

And we see that as we watch Abraham here. We're only in Genesis 12. We're at the very start of the Bible.

[33 : 04] And we see very clearly here that those who follow God to the place that he wants them to be in, they don't always experience health and wealth and happiness.

Abraham gets to the land that God showed him. And the economies burst. The shelves are empty. There's no food in the shops. The place is in crisis. So what does Abraham do? Does he trust God and find out the easy way, and early on in his life, that when you trust God, the Lord will provide what you need?

Well, no, he doesn't do that. Abraham, he realizes he's had problems. He realizes there's a famine. And so he packs his bags.

And he heads for Egypt. There was a famine in the land, verse 10. And Abraham went down to Egypt to live there for a while, because the famine was severe.

[34 : 23] Was that the right thing to do? Well, I think probably it wasn't. I think the commentators should know a lot more than me think that probably was the wrong move.

Weerspe says, That's what Weerspe says.

I think we've got to be a little more cautious than that, because it doesn't actually say, there's not a verse in the Bible. Moses doesn't give an editorial comment here and say, Abraham went to Egypt and that was the wrong move.

This was his first disaster. No, Moses, as he writes this, he's silent on this. He doesn't pass comment on the fact that Abraham went to Egypt.

But we know as we continue to read through the Bible that Egypt is a place that represents opposition to God. And yet when Abraham hits the crisis, that's where we see him heading.

[35 : 38] There's no famine in Egypt, he says. The shelves are full in Egypt. There's provisions in Egypt. And so Abraham decides that he's going there.

And so the irony of this, when we step back from this, is that we see Abraham, he is willing to trust God with a huge promise of provision for the future.

Because remember, God calls him and he says, leave your land, leave your home, leave your people, leave everything. And follow me to the land that I'll show you. He doesn't give him much clarity about where he's going.

But Abraham, in response to this call, he trusts God with a huge promise of provision for the future. But he doesn't trust God enough to provide for his food.

Trust him for the future. But he doesn't trust him for his food. And we can often do the same. We trust God to provide for us in the eternal sense.

[36 : 49] We trust God to provide for us forgiveness of sin. Eternal life. A heavenly home.

But when it comes to this worldly thing, when it comes to the crisis of health and education and our jobs, our family situation, the nuts and bolts of life, when things start to go wrong at the very basic level, very often, rather than trusting God, and saying to the Lord, I don't know what to do here. Please help me. We panic. We stress. We worry. And we often take matters into our own hands, rather than trusting on the Lord to provide for our needs.

So, like Abraham, I think we often need to learn that the Lord will provide.

It's the first point. The second lesson that Abraham has to learn is that the Lord will protect. Verse 11.

[38 : 13] As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, I know what a beautiful woman you are. And just a wee note here in the passing.

This is the first thing we hear Abraham saying. We see him in the verses of Scripture. We can see his movements here, but the first words that come out of Abraham's mouth that are recorded in Scripture is his words to his wife Sarai, and he says, I know what a beautiful woman you are.

So there's maybe a lesson for some of us husbands to be more ready to say that. I know what a beautiful woman you are. The other thing to note, perhaps, is Abraham's wife, Sarai.

She was 65 at this point. She wasn't 21 on the cover of Vogue magazine. She was 65. And Abraham still is very much clear that he sees her beauty.

So the conversation, it begins well, but it goes downhill from there. Because he turns to his wife, and he says in verse 12, when the Egyptians see you, they will say, this is his wife.

[39 : 34] Then they will kill me, but they'll let you live. Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake, and my life will be spared because of you.

So this is Abraham's plan. Why does he say this? Why?

And who is he thinking about as he comes up with this plan? Well, he's not thinking about the Lord as he makes this scheme. He's not thinking about his wife because he's putting his wife in danger as he activates this plan.

He's not thinking about the Lord. His eyes seem to be off the Lord at this point as he's tracked off down the wrong way. No, Abraham at this point is thinking about himself.

Self has taken the controls here. And if anything will cause you and I to divert off the track of God's will, if anything will do damage to us spiritually, if anything will do damage to the people who are around us, it's a living self to direct us.

[40 : 57] And we're in a really dangerous culture just now because we are so fixated on self. We're encouraged constantly to look at ourselves, to please ourselves, to lift up ourselves.

So when we get what we want, we're delighted and we fill with pride. And when we don't get exactly what we want, we think the world is unfair and we go into a state of self-pity. We're constantly looking at ourselves.

And yet the Bible is very clear that if we are followers of Jesus, we are to deny self. Matthew 16, 24. Or the Apostle Paul in Romans 6 tells us we are to crucify self. Not hand over the controls to self and please ourselves and let our emotions and our selfish desires run wild.

So what happened next? Verse 14. When Abram came to Egypt, the Egyptians saw that she was a very beautiful woman.

[42 : 13] And when Pharaoh's officials saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And she, Sarah, was taken into his. That's Pharaoh's palace.

And Abram, as he made this plan, he hadn't factored this in. See, Abram, he knew that once he went into Egypt, the Egyptians would take notice of Sarah.

They would have an interest in Sarah. And so he thought, well, if I pretend to be her brother, if there are those who make advances and who want to marry her, I can negotiate with them.

I can protect myself. Maybe he foolishly thought he could protect her as well. Because in these days, marriage negotiations took a long time. They were very protracted. So Abram's plan, it was not a good plan, but we can see some logic in it.

But what Abram hadn't thought about was that Pharaoh might be interested. And if Pharaoh took a shine to Sarah, there was no negotiations.

[43 : 22] There was no discussion. He just takes her. And that's what happens. Sarah's taken. Pharaoh's guys say, have you seen this new girl?

She's beautiful. He sees her. He likes her. He takes her. And Abram can do nothing about it.

The so-called protection that he was scheming to provide was worth nothing. And we should pause there.

And acknowledge the fact that this is always the way. Our schemes never work out that well. I could tell you stories about my life and when I've tried to engineer things in my own strength, using my own so-called intelligence, and they've been a disaster.

[44 : 28] See, when we try to do in our strength what we should be trusting God to do, it's always a disaster. But the sad thing is we often have to go to Egypt to learn that, as Abram did.

So how does it work out for Abram? Well, verse 16, Pharaoh treated Abram well for Sarah's sake and Abram acquired sheep and cattle and male and female donkeys, men's servants and maidservants and camels.

And we might say, especially those who keep sheep and animals, we might say, well, Abram doesn't do too bad out of this. He's got more sheep on the hill.

He's got more cattle in the ranch. He's rich. He gets rich out of this. But what we don't yet see is that the riches that Abram acquires at this point are going to be the cause of a whole lot of trouble just a wee bit down the road.

So even what appears to be advantageous is actually going to be a huge problem. So all in all, Abram's plan was a huge failure.

[45 : 53] And now we see Sarah and Abram in a whole lot of trouble. And so how are they going to get out of it? Where would the help come from?

Where do they look now? Well, the answer comes in the next three words. Because if you look at verse 17, the first three words of verse 17 are, but the Lord.

We see all the disaster of Abram. All the mess that he's in. And then we read these three words, but the Lord.

And that takes us to the third point. The Lord, we'll preserve. Verse 17, but the Lord inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abram's wife Sarah.

Now, if we think just back a little to when God first spoke to Abram, remember the gist of it. God says to Abram, I will bless you so that you will be a blessing to others.

[47 : 02] That's God's will for Abraham. But as Abraham steps out of God's will, very quickly, we see that he doesn't bring blessing to those who are around him.

In fact, he is the cause of judgment falling on Pharaoh and his household. And there's a lesson there in application for us.

When you and I step out of God's will, whether we step into clear sin or whether it's slightly more subtle and when we allow self to take the controls of our life, he'll always take us into sin.

But when we step out of God's will, it's never just us. It's never just me that's affected when I stray. It's never just you that is affected when you stray out of God's will.

Everyone around us is affected by our sin. And we see that in Pharaoh's household. So, Pharaoh summoned Abram, verse 18.

[48 : 17] What have you done to me? He said. Why didn't you tell me she was your wife? Why did you say she is my sister so that I took her to be my wife?

Now then, here is your wife. Take her and go. Then Pharaoh gave orders about Abram to his men and he sent him on his way and everything he had.

There's a tragedy there when it's the ungodly man, Pharaoh, that actually has to speak into Abram's life to remind him of what God said in the first place.

Sometimes that happens. We find that we as Christians end up being confronted by someone who's not a Christian as they say to us, what are you doing? Why did you say that?

Why are you living this way? And that's what happens here with Abram. Pharaoh, of all people, is the one that challenges him about the lack of holiness in his life.

[49 : 23] And Pharaoh says, all these diseases, all these plagues, all this that has come to my household is linked to you and your lives. Now, how did Pharaoh know that? Well, we don't know, we're not told.

How did Pharaoh find out that Sarah was Abram's wife? We don't know, we're not told that. But what we do know that was in the midst of all this mess, God was at work.

And through these diseases, the Lord was releasing Sarah from Pharaoh's grasp, and the Lord was releasing Abram from Egypt, and the Lord was preserving their lives.

So the preservation, we could say, of Sarah and Abram is nothing to do with Abram, but it's everything to do with the Lord.

Abram made a mess of everything, but the Lord delivered them, preserved them.

[50 : 37] from the mess and actually in the mess. So as we see Abram leaving Egypt unscathed, he's got nothing to boast about, because the saving work is all of God, and that's a pointer forward for us to our salvation.

salvation. This is a preview we could see of Ephesians 2, where we're told we were dead in our transgressions and sin.

We were lost, we were hopeless, we were in an absolute spiritual mess. but God, because of his great love for us, he saved us, he preserved us, he is the one who restored our souls.

It's all been done for us by God, through Jesus, and that work on the cross. What is grace? Grace is God's riches, his preservation, his salvation, at Christ's expense.

For it's by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast.

[52 : 00] The Lord will preserve. That's what Abram learned. He learned that the Lord is the one who can protect when he can't protect. He learned that the Lord is the one who provides, and he learns finally and very briefly, the Lord is the one who will persevere with his failing people.

So Abram, verse 1 of chapter 13, went up from Egypt to the Negev with his wife and everything he had, and Lot went with him. Abram had become very wealthy in livestock and silver and gold.

From the Negev he went from place to place until he came to Bethel to the place between Bethel and Ai, where his tent had been earlier and where he had first built an altar.

There Abram called on the name of the Lord. So as we finish with these words in Genesis 13 at the beginning, where is Abram now?

he's right back to the place that he was in before he set off for Egypt. He's back to the start. He's been taken back to the place where he had first built the altar, before he went off in his own strength, using his own initiative to Egypt.

[53 : 31] When things go wrong with the computer, there was a problem with the sign, I think it was last week, and I could see a wee bit of stress in the camera in front of me, and I said to Stuart, afterwards, how did you fix it?

He says, switched it off and switched it on again. And that's always what we do when we have a problem with the computer. We just hit reset. reset. It takes you back to the start.

And it's here as if God hits the reset button for Abram, and Abram is now back to the start. He's back to the place that he was in before he left for Egypt.

And now Abram is humbled. He has experienced something in the way of discipline. And he's more likely to trust in God now.

He's more ready to listen to God rather than lean on his own understanding. One commentator Eveson says, this sad experience brought Abram back to the Lord.

[54 : 40] Abram retraced the steps from Egypt to the negative and on as far as Bethel to the place where he had camped soon after his arrival in Canaan and to the place of the altar which he had made there at first.

there he worshipped the Lord. Whenever we backslide, says Eveson, there is nothing else to do but to come back by the old gateway of genuine repentance and simple faith.

faith. So here we have very clear guidance on what we are to do when we fail and we fall and we stray.

We repent. We change direction as Abram did. We come back to God in repentance and worship. And we have a great illustration here of how the Lord deals with us when we mess up and then we repent. The answer is he perseveres with us.

[55 : 56] Abram is not fired. Abram is not discarded by God. God's promises are not withdrawn.

See, what the Lord starts, he sees through to completion and not Pharaoh and not famine and not even his own incompetent people like us can stop it.

Philippians 1.6 says, he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

And if there's anyone here tonight who hasn't yet asked God to begin a work of grace in your life, ask him now.

It's by grace that he saves us and it's by grace that he keeps us and the lesson that we're learning through Abram's life is that we're simply to trust him.

[57 : 20] So let's trust him. We'll sing now about the grace that leads the sinner home. The words are on the screen and we'll stand to sing in closing.

the grace that leads the sinner home from death to life forever and sings the song of righteousness by blood and not by merit.

You release that reaches far and wide to every tribe and nation has called my heart to enter in the joy of your salvation.

grace by grace I am redeemed by grace I am restored and now I'm feeling walk into the arms of Christ my Lord your grace that I cannot explain not by my earthly wisdom the price of life without a stake was traded for this sinner by grace I am redeemed by grace I am restored and now

I freely walk into the arms of Christ my Lord let praise rise up and over overflow my song my song reserved forever for grace will see me welcomed home to walk beside my Savior by grace by grace I am redeemed by grace I am restored and now I freely walk into the arms of Christ my Lord and I may that grace of the

[60 : 36] Lord the Father be with us all now and forevermore. Amen.