

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one who still calls you to follow, Jesus Christ our Lord, amen.

Last week we heard the story of Noah, his family, and the animals sailing in the ark, and then God making a promise to all the people and creatures of the earth. Noah's family included three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. The oldest son, Shem, is the great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandfather (that's seven greats!) of Abram, who we heard about today. Abram had two brothers, one of whom died, leaving a son. The whole family, including Abram's wife, his father, Abram's brother and his wife, and their nephew decided to move away from their home in Ur and go to the land of Canaan. Along the way, they stopped in a town called Haran — which was also the name of Abram's brother that had died. The family stopped there and couldn't bring themselves to go any further, and Abram's father died there as well. We picked up the story today when the family is there in Haran.

Last week in the story of Noah, I asked what made Noah so special that God decided He and his family should be saved from the flood. My conclusion was that Noah (1) listened to God's Word, (2) trusted God's word, and (3) acted on God's Word. Many Christians point to Abram as the Father of our faith, but he was carrying on in the long tradition established by his forefather 7 greats

removed, Noah. Since Abram gets the publicity as being the father of our faith, lets take a closer look at what that really means...

In the very first verse we hear God calling Abram to leave the country of his father and go to an unknown destination. He's asking Abram to leave his relatives and friends behind and to go someplace where only God knows what awaits. Abram packs up his wife, his father, his brother and his wife and his nephew from his other brother, Haran, who had already died. Along with these few family members Abram brings along over 300 servants and their wives and children as well. This is no small move. We're talking about a pretty good size migration and Abram is the patriarch of the caravan. The way God dealt with Abram is typical of the way that he deals with all sinners. If contact between God and sinner is to be established, God has to make the first move. Therefore, one facet of faith is that it is a gift from God. Abram's father was a pagan and worshipped false gods. If the one true living God had not interceded, Abram would most likely follow in his father's footsteps and worshipped false gods as well. That was not God's plan. God came to Abram and Abram was never the same again. The same scenario was true of the Disciples. In the Gospel of John, Jesus said, "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (John 15:16a). I reject the notion that it was my decision to believe in the Lord God. It was and always will be God who does the choosing!

What would motivate God to pick one person out of all the humans that were alive during the time of Abram for God's special gift of faith? The answer for Abram is the exact same answer I came up with for Noah last week. Abram listened to God's Word, Abram trusted in God's Word, and Abram acted on God's Word. That is all true for Abram, but as in the case of Noah their stories would not be told or remembered except that God spoke to them first and then they listened, trusted, and acted... We would have never heard the name Abram if God hadn't first spoken to Abram and called him into a relationship of trust. So, what moved God to do this? It was the same thing that motivated God to call your name. God has this inexplicable undeserved love for sinners. Paul said it best to the Roman Christians, "[salvation] does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy" (Rom. 9:16). The same thing, of course, can be said about us. If God had not graciously used our parents, grandparents, or friends to bring us into contact with his Word, we would still be lost and condemned sinners. God always acts first. God always comes down from heaven out of kindness to the creation God made with love.

The second thing we discover about faith from this story of the call of Abram is that faith is not blind, nor is it some kind of a betting or speculation based on the best evidence at hand. When God told Abram to go to a land he would tell him about, Abram went, not because he felt this was the right thing to

do, or because he had heard about great riches and prosperity in other lands, but because God had given him a cluster of awesome promises. God said 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. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen. 12:2, 3). Faith is a certain confidence based on the rock-solid promises of our God who never lies. In that way Christianity is truly unique. When God wants to move us to action He does so not by demanding or threatening punishment, but by promising. For example, when God tells us not to be afraid, He doesn’t just command it, but promises to protect and provide for us thereby giving us a reason not to be afraid. When we base our faith on our feelings, our own thoughts and desires, or on anything in this created world, we’re on thin ice. True faith is founded on God’s promises and nothing else. That’s why it’s important for us to stay connected to God’s Word—that’s where we find those promises.

A story about a long dead man and his trip across the desert from Ur to Canaan might not seem all that relevant to us modern folks, but the promises God made to Abram are still true for us today. God said Abram would be blessed with many descendants. He was. God said every family on earth would be blessed through those descendants. Since Jesus Christ is a direct descendant of Father Abraham and since Jesus is the one who lived without sin and took our sin upon

himself and since God raised Jesus from the dead with the promise that we will be with Jesus for all eternity, we are the direct beneficiaries of God's plan of salvation. God's plan for the world runs through this wandering Aramean named Abram. So, why did God pick Abram, you'll have to ask God someday for yourself. For me it comes down to trust. I simply trust God has the master plan and I don't need to know all the nitty gritty details. It's enough for me to read these stories about redemption and faith and know God not only had a plan for the world, but also has a plan for me. Why did God pick Mel Musser, all the way up in Alaska for this journey. I have no idea, but I know my mother made certain I knew from an early age that God did indeed have a plan for my life. No matter how far I ran away from the plan, God always sought me out and spoke words of love and forgiveness. God always invited me into a deeper relationship and when I finally responded to that call, God has always carried me through the highs and the lows.

Abram's story is the very same story for each and every one of us who have responded to God's call. The details about who, what, and where may be totally different, but the plot and the story line are the same. God appears, speaks, calls your name and you listened. You trusted the promises of God were for you and then you acted in faith to be in that loving relationship with our awesome God. I think that's how faith works...

May you hear God's voice when He calls your name. May you trust the promises God is making to you today, because God is incapable of telling a lie. May you act in faith on the call God is placing on you this day and every day until in God's mercy, He calls you to your heavenly rest. All glory and honor be to this God of promise, amen.