

Genesis 12:1-4½

Who is Abram? Who is this person who God chooses to speak directly to and make a covenant with? Well, he's Abram, son of Terah, a direct descendant of Shem, who was one of Noah's sons. Noah and his sons are the world population after the flood. They spread out all over the Ancient Near East, and so in a real sense when we ask, "Who is Abram?" The answer is simply, "Well nobody any more special than the others. No magic genealogy; he's simply the one the Lord chose. Like you or me, or anyone else." Except...except the Lord speaks to Abram and makes a promise. Specifically the Lord commands Abram, then follows the command with a promise. Have we seen this pattern before? Sure with Adam & Eve "Be fruitful and multiply" "See I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth...with dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle and over all the wild animals of the earth..." We see this pattern again with Noah, "build yourself an ark...I will establish my covenant with you," and Noah and his family go on to inherit the earth. And after Noah we see the pattern again realized with Abram.

You know it's funny, when I read this passage to myself I hear a particular voice for God...I hear ----- Bill Cosby. Maybe you were expecting me to say Charlton Heston or James Earl Jones, but at least for the Old Testament I hear Bill Cosby. See he did this bit one time where he reinterpreted the dialogue between Noah and God. Maybe you know the one I'm talking about.

There's a fellow by the name of Noah, built an ark. Everybody knows he built an ark, people say "What did Noah do?" "Well he built an ark." But very few people know about the conversation that went on between the Lord and Noah. See Noah was in his rec room sawing away, making a few things for the home there, he was a pretty good amateur carpenter.

L: "Noah!"

N: "Somebody call?"

L: "Noah!"

N: "Who is that?"

L: "It's the Lord."

(pause)

L: "Noah?"

N: "Riiight. Where are you? What do you want? I've been good."

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L: "I want you to build an ark!"

N: "Right. (pause) What's an ark?"

L: "Get some wood. Build it. 300 cubits by 80 cubits by 40 cubits."

N: "Right. (pause) What's a cubit?"

L: "Let's see I used to know what a cubit was, well do n't worry about that Noah, when you get that done go out into the world and collect all the of the animals in the world by twos, male and female, and put them into the ark."

N: "Riiight! Who is this really? What's going on? How come you want me to do all these weird things?"

So when I read this passage about Abram I'm tempted to hear the same voice of God saying something like:

L: "Abram go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." To which Abram should reply?

A: "Riiight."

L: "This journey will take you thousands of miles across foreign lands, coming in contact with hostile tribes and nations, over mountain ranges,"

A: "Uhh -huh."

L: "through perilous deserts,"

A: "Uhh -huh."

L: "responsible to your extended family and explaining this to them because they may regard it as slightly unreasonable."

A: "Right."

L: "And I will make you a great nation, even though Sarai is barren, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing."

A: "Riiight."

L: "I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

A: "Right, who is this? Who is this really? Why do you want me to do all this strange stuff? Am I on candid camera?"

It's such a drastic change, such a dramatic command that it should give us pause to think how we might answer this command. Would we take it seriously? Would we more likely regard it as foolishness? It all depends on who we think the speaker is. Whether we believe this is a call from God.

Abram clearly believes that God, the one and only, all-powerful, sovereign, creator is giving him this command and so he does the logical thing – he

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goes. Packs right up and moves out, even taking Lot's family with him. And why? Well, probably once he does all this the Lord is going to bless him beyond belief, turn him from a successful shepherd into a king. (pause) Nope. That's the tempting analysis of the passage, but it's not what's written. There is no "if – then" statement here. God doesn't make the promise conditional, "If you go from your country to the land that I will show you, then I will make you a great nation." No. These sentences are independent of each other, not conditional. The first is a command, the second is a promise. Abram goes not because of the promise, but because he knows who is talking to him. He is in the presence of earth-shattering, jaw dropping, mind blowing, shock and awe. He doesn't ask the question "Who is this?" Rather God says "Jump!" and Abram doesn't even stop to say "How high?"

Lest we regard this as a fluke or Abram as some sort of imbecile who undertakes this journey on a whim we have several other instances of similar encounters between God and Abram.

Gen 17:9-10 God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised." And Abram goes right out and does it.

Gen. 22:1-3 God said to Abraham, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you." So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him."

And it's not just Abram who does this right? We have similar encounters between God and all the major leaders of Israel. Paul recounts as much in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews giving examples with Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, the Judges, Prophets and Kings.

Heb. 11:1ff. "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. By

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faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.” What Paul is saying is that God’s promises bring God’s blessings into the sphere of redemption. God’s promises bring God’s blessings into the sphere of redemption.

So what does this mean for us, here, this morning? What is the Lord saying to us in this passage? “Get up and go now!” “Go where? What do you want us to do?” All right those are fair questions; are we ready for the answer? Okay, then here it is:

Matt 4:18-22 As Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea – for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.”

So that’s what we are called to do, drop everything and follow Jesus, but what does that look like?

v.14 “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

What are we called to give?

v.38 “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.”

What are we called to sacrifice?

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v.34 ‘So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.’ We sacrifice our agendas for that of the God’s.

In what manner will we go about this?

7:24-28 ‘Everyone who then hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell – and great was its fall!’

This isn’t Bill Cosby spoofing God speaking to us. This is God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit terribly earnest saying, ‘You shall give everything. You shall tithe and give even more. You shall take care of your neighbors, and the neighbor’s neighbors. You shall pray without ceasing. You shall witness to my goodness and glory and mercy in everything you do.’

Sound tough? Yes. Sound impossible? Yes. Sound similar to what Noah, Abram, Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist and a host of others were called to do? Yes. So why even try? Because we know who’s speaking to us. And we know this one is the one who promises ‘Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’

So Abram went. . I hope that’s our starting point for considering our lives and what’s to be done with them. I hope it takes precedent over the clutter of other responsibilities and compromises I have built in my own life, like a house upon the sand. When we reflect on this later today, and perhaps throughout the week I hope we’ll consider how we use our time and talents. I hope we’ll take a look at the mission opportunities suggested by our church and, like Abram, go. I hope we’ll consider the way we give to the life of the church, and like the disciples, give all. I hope we will be a light unto the world. I hope, we hope, because God first spoke to us. Amen.