

Get thee to Canaan

Gen 12

I think it's channel ten has started having what they call a seriously short break for ads. So you don't get up and walk away or fast forward through. Well here's a seriously short recap of Genesis so far. We looked at the first 12 chapters up to Abraham last year. In the beginning God makes the perfect world. He makes everything from nothing by his word. He makes men and women in his image to rule over the world under him. He tells them to be fruitful and multiply. But Satan deceives Adam and Eve and they rebel, and get kicked out of the garden. With a promise that a son will come who'll crush the snake's head. But Cain the firstborn doesn't quite live up to that. And sin gets worse and spreads. To the point where God sends a flood to destroy everything and starts again with the righteous Noah and his family. Who's also told to be fruitful and fill the earth.

But sin isn't drowned in the flood. And men multiply in rebellion against God. And they build the tower of babel in defiance and to make a name for themselves, which God puts to a stop by confusing their languages. Which brings us to Abram. A descendant in the line of Shem. Who God promises to bless personally, and the world through him.

Here's the promises to Abram.

Bible reading

Slide - coaster

At Movie World on the Gold Coast there's a rollercoaster called the Superman Escape. And it's a bit different to a most rollercoasters. Most of them you start out by being pulled fairly slowly up to the top of the first big hill. Click click click up you go. Then down the first big dip and off you go round the rest of the course. But in the Superman ride. What happens is. You wind your way through what's supposed to be the Metropolis subway. It's a bit eerie and quiet. Then there's a big bang and alarms start going off. And an announcement that there's been an earthquake. And the subway's about to collapse. So before the whole place collapses. Superman's got to push you out. Superman fast. That's what you hear Superman saying. And he's not kidding.

Because at that point the Superman escape, which is stopped. Goes from zero to 100km/h in TWO SECONDS. Quicker than the fastest Ferrari in the world, faster than a formula one racing car. 0 to 100 in two seconds. And just as your eyes hit the back of your head the whole thing goes straight up. All you can see is sky until you're thirteen stories up. Then it goes over...and straight down, and you pull up just before you hit the ground. A few more gut churning twists and turns and climbs and drops later. You scream to a stop at the station. And start trying to remember who you are.

It's an exciting ride.

And I'm proud to say. We're talking about the great man Abraham today the man of faith.

And I'm proud to say. I too, am a man of faith. Because I stepped onto that rollercoaster. And I think we might even have a photo to prove it.

Now in a sense. That's what Abraham did. He went on a trip.

He might not have done 4g's and I'm sure his camels weren't anywhere near as fast. But in the end it's not that different. Because whether you're trembling in your boots, or you're full of confidence. Faith is about being convinced that someone or something's worth trusting in.

While the superman ride might be scary. I know it's been round and round thousands of times without one person flying out of it. I watched it go round with my own eyes. I was convinced. It would be ok.

And although Abraham's known as the great man of faith. In the end, it's only great faith because of the greatness of the God who he puts his faith in. As Abraham steps out in faith. He's convinced God's worth trusting.

So as we look at Abraham and his actions over the coming weeks. Abraham's a great model in the sense that he does what God says.

He's not the perfect model mind you. It's only Jesus who's the perfect model.

But Abraham, he's called the father of those who have faith. And it's great to learn from him. Or at least. Learn from his story. Because he gets it wrong along the way as well. Abraham stumbles in his faith. But at the same time God's still faithful. Which is the point. And what we'll see here is someone who starts pretty

well. But stumbles. But also grows in faith. As he sees God at work until you get to really the high point of faith in the OLD TESTAMENT where he's even prepared to offer up his own son, the son of the promise as a sacrifice to God. Because of his trust in the God who's trustworthy.

So I guess we're along for the ride with Abraham here. But it's God's faithfulness that's on show. That we need to look out for.

And it starts notice there. It doesn't start with Abraham. It starts with God. IT starts with God's choosing, and his calling. Without that it doesn't make a scrap of difference how much faith Abraham has or doesn't have. Unless God calls, unless God promises. Without God's call and purpose and intention. Abraham's a nobody. He's no more than the son of a sheep tending moon worshipping Mesopotamian wanderer. He remains in obscurity unless God calls.

So that's for starters. God calls. And maybe it's not quite strong enough to put it that way. Because if you look there at verse 1 it's more like conscription if you ask me.

Genesis 12:1 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.

Leave and go. They're commands really aren't they. Leave and go...to somewhere I'll show you -me to know and you to find out where that's going to be -.

It's fairly short and sweet and direct.

Actually I like the King James Version. It's not very often I'd say that. The KJV puts it this way.

Slide - GET THEE OUT.

Abraham. Get thee out of thy country.

Leave and Go.

Is it a voice he hears, is it a dream? Is it a hand writing on the wall? Don't know. But whatever it was. It convinced Abraham that he needed to do what he was told. And leave.

And you might hear echoes of Adam and Eve's unceremonious exit from the Garden. When they had to LEAVE the place God had given them. Because they hadn't trusted God.

Except this time it's the reverse. And we're at the start of the journey back to a place of blessing. Back to a place of trust.

God says I will make your name great. And bless you. And through you...all the people of the world.

And trust will be restored again.

On the other hand if you look forward. You'll see a bit of a parallel with what Jesus calls people to in the New Testament. As he calls his disciples. Leave your fishing

nets he says. And follow me. There's a leaving involved in following Jesus. Leave your old way of life.

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Matthew 16:24 ²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

And as Jesus travels around the countryside he says to the people of Israel. Repent he says. Leave your old way of living. And live God's way. So there's a leaving at the core of our gospel message.

And it's a hard thing. It's a big ask. And it's sort of emphasised there. In Abraham's leaving.

Genesis 12:1 Leave your country, your people and your father's household

Leave everyone and everything you know.

And God says I'll do what I've said I'll do.

Now Abraham's a bit like the Brisbane Lions this year. He starts out pretty well. At the age of 75 he packs up his whole family and everything he's got. (A bit like the Hoadleys are doing this week). And he heads off. And he takes his nephew Lot and his family with him.

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And he travels to Shechem which is pretty much you can see there right in the middle of the promised land. And there in the end of verse 6. The Canaanites were there it says. But walk up and down all over the place God says. Because to your offspring I will give this land. Twice in verse 7 we're told that God actually appeared to Abram in that place.

So just get a picture of what God's promising here. Abram whose name means father. Isn't a father at all. Hasn't got even one child because Sarai his wife can't have kids. He's 75 years old...and God says you'll be a great nation. And God says your offspring will possess this land that all these people, these Canaanitesare living in.

But off he goes there verse 8 off he goes with his caravan of camels and donkeys and family and workers. And they're checking out the new place. Like it's a mater prize home.

And at the same time...as he goes around. He's setting up altars to the Lord. In the land of the Cannanites and their gods the Baals. Which is a bit like planting your national flag in someone else's country.

Abram seems to have a fair amount of trust in God at this point. It's a great start.

But look at what happens next.

Here's faith challenge number one. There's a famine in the land. So what are you going to do?

So Abram does what you do in a famine. You go where the food is. In this case that means leavingand heading south down to Egypt. Which might have you scratching your head about whether that's the right thing to do if you trust God. But what happens next is fairly astonishing.

And it's almost like Abraham changes gears from trust in God's promises mode. To survival mode.

Because Egypt is dangerous. And it's dangerous because of Sarai Abram's wife. It's dangerous because she's so good looking. And the problem is. If Pharaoh sees her, and if he wants her for himself, Abram's done for.

Genesis 12:11-12 ¹¹ As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "I know what a beautiful woman you are. ¹² When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me but will let you live.

So here's the plan and you can follow it in verse 13 and following. Plan is. When we get there. You say. You're my sister.

Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you.

And that's exactly what happens. Which is good for Abram. But it's not so good for Sarah, and when you think about it.... it's not so good for God's promises of kids. When your wife's in the harem of the king.

We're hardly out of the starting blocks. And things look pretty doubtful for God's promises already.

And logically...you can understand why Abram does what he does. After all ...he's right about them wanting to take his wife. They did see her. And they took her. Although they did think she was his sister. But maybe he's right that they would have killed him if he didn't pretend he was the brother.

So maybe the end sort of justifies the means. You do what you've got to do. And he might even have told himself he was helping God out because it's pretty hard for the promises to come true if he's dead.

If it was you, you might even say we're told to be as shrewd as snakes. So isn't Abraham just doing that?

Well no actually. He's been outright deceptive. Which is why Abraham's hauled before Pharaoh for a dressing down. And it's a strange sort of a scene where the tables are turned. Verse 17. Pharaoh takes Sarai...

Genesis 12:17-20 ...¹⁷ But the LORD inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abram's wife Sarai. ¹⁸ So Pharaoh summoned Abram.

"What have you done to me?" he said. "Why didn't you tell me she was your wife?"

¹⁹ 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!" ²⁰ Then Pharaoh gave orders about Abram to his men, and they sent him on his way, with his wife and everything he had.

See think about it. Why does Abram need his cunning plan? Well Number one he needs it because ...you can't trust these Egyptians. They've got no integrity. They'd just take my wife and kill me. No problem. They're ruthless. That's the first thing. But also....because they're so powerful. And how's anyone stand up to the power and might of Pharaoh.

But the irony is. As it turns out...it's Pharaoh who shows the integrity. It's Pharaoh who lectures Abram about deceit. And fortunately he's NOT GUILTY of violating Abram's wife. No thanks to Abram. Pharaoh comes out squeaky clean. And at the same time – God proves to be more than a match for Pharaoh anyway. It's Pharaoh's that's on his knees...before the power of Abram's God. Pharaoh the one whose power Abram feared. Running scared... And in the end God uses his power over Pharaohto save Abram from Abram. Rather than Abram from Pharaoh.

And Abram gets sent back to God's promised land. With the addition of some booty from Egypt care of the Pharaoh – and it won't be the last time that happens either.

And I'm guessing that's a pretty good lesson for Abram. And he's growing in his faith. Because he's coming to understand what God's like. And to trust in God's trustworthiness. And that's what strong faith is. See it's not as though Abraham graduates from southbank tafe with a certificate on the theory of faith. He's coming to know and understand the one who's faithful. That's what we sing isn't it. Great is thy faithfulness. It's a declaration of God's trustworthiness.

So Abram's learning that God's willing, and able to come good on his promises.

And that's really the test of faith. Do you believe that?

Do you believe that God's trustworthy? Yes or No.

Is he really good, is he really God? And is he to be trusted, or not?

Now God may not have appeared to you like he did to Abram. I'll grant you that.

But then again we've got a fair bit more to go on than Abram did.

We've got thousands of years of the records of God's faithfulness to his promises that started with Abram. And we've seen Jesus the one God spoke about to Adam and Eve, the one who'd crush the serpent's head.

The offspring of Abraham who'd be the one to bring God's blessing to the world.

We've seen him come into the world. Submit himself to death. Stand in the place of sinners like us. We know God raised him from the dead. So that even death is robbed of it's sting because of the hope of the resurrection.

BECAUSE..... God's good. BECAUSE..... God said I will to Abram. All the promises whatever they are Paul says in 2 Corinthians. All the promises...they're yes in Jesus.

Because God's faithful. He's good. He's willing and able to do what he's promised. Which means you can trust him.

And that's the thrust of the gospel. Why run away from the only one who's worthy of your trust? Who's demonstrated that so fully in Jesus. God's trustworthy, and Jesus is the fullest expression of that fact.

So do you that's the question?

For salvation and forgiveness. Yes. But what about for the way you live and what you hope to get out of life?

I mean I think I'd be a bit frightened if someone were to sit down and analyse my decision making process like we did with Abram in this passage.

Now I'm presuming God hasn't appeared to you and promised land and blessing and kids at the age of 75. That's been done before. And I presume he hasn't told you to leave your land and your dad's house and your family.

But what he has promised. Is that if you leave behind that old life and come to him. You'll find the fullness of the blessings that come through Jesus Christ. What he has promised, is that he'll be with you by his spirit.

Because it's not going to be easy to leave that old life behind. And to walk in Jesus footsteps. What are you called to? In Romans 1 Paul says

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Romans 1:5 ⁵ Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles (that's you and I)

To call people - not to the middle east. To call people

to the obedience that comes from faith.

So as you and I grow in trust in the one who's trustworthy. We'll walk in obedience to him rather than to our own selfish self interest. And that's the ongoing work of God's spirit as we grow in faith as well.

Jesus says seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. Do you trust him enough to do that? Or not. What are you seeking first? Do you trust him enough to stand up and be known as one of his followers. Or like Abram, are you fearful of doing that? To the point where you hide in shame. Have you really left the old way of life behind...or do you cling to some inappropriate behaviours. And you rationalize it away somehow. Does what you want for your kids...line up with what God thinks is best.

Let's keep watching Abram. As God comes good on his promises. And lets keep learning to trust in our great God. And lets keep growing in faith together.