

Abram's Foolishness and God's

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Preacher: Chris Trousdale

[0:00] Let's go.

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[2:34] Let's go.

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to that store and return it. This wasn't cheap. So we turn, we do a U-turn in the middle of a parking lot to get back to the gas station. And then my freshly hot coffee spilled over into my lap and burned my leg. And so that made me kind of mad. I was a little irritated and now I needed to change clothes. So I went in the gas station and I made the exchange and went in and changed clothes. And then we got in the car and we got back on the road and we were back on the road for a while. And finally I was starting to get a little bit tired. I'd run out of coffee and it was dark. It was late. And I said, guys, let's pull over and get a hotel. So we pulled over and we pull up to the hotel. And that's when I realized my wallet was back at that God forsaken gas station that was, it had, it was just entirely a, just a hole in pit of bad luck for me on the vacation was that one gas station. And, and I never found it and I never got it back. And the challenge at that point was that you can't get a hotel room without a driver's license. You, you can pay because I could call Allie and she was, she, she had her card and could give, give them information on the phone, but nobody will give you a hotel room without a driver's license. And so I gave up on getting in a hotel room and thought, well, let's just head back. But then I looked at how many miles

I had left that to go, you know, how the cars tell you how far you can go on a tank of gas. And it wasn't even close. So there I was, couldn't get a hotel room and couldn't quite make it back home and only had \$27 of cash in my wallet, well not in my wallet, but in my pocket at the time.

And, and we, we found a way to get back home. Eventually I figured out why I can still use my phone if I can just find a gas station that takes Apple pay. And we finally, after a while, after trying several, found one and got enough gas and drove all the way through and made it back home.

[6:17] But it was a, it was a strange feeling to be at the, at the point where I realized I didn't have my wallet. I checked the GPS and I was still 400 miles away from home. And it was a strange thing to be 400 miles away from home with really none of the things that I needed in order to make it home and in order even to, to get through the night really, to get a hotel or to purchase food or any of those things until I realized about an hour later that I could actually use my phone for some of those things. It just felt like we're somewhat stranded. Yes, we can go down the road a little ways, but \$27 is only going to get you so far and it's not going to get you 400 miles with the mileage that we get on our vehicle. And so it was just this odd, strange feeling of thinking, okay, so what am I going to do now? How are we going to get home? Or how, where are we going to sleep tonight? What are we going to do? We were, we were just sort of strangers and out there and felt kind of a little bit by ourselves. Thankfully, the kids slept through the vast majority of all of that.

They slept for several hours. And so that was good. And the Lord did provide and brought us home. But, but I had been throughout the week while we were gone, I had been studying here in Genesis chapter 12 and, and was, and was thinking to myself, what I'm experiencing in this moment is nothing compared to what Abraham, to what Abram faced here in Genesis chapter 12. It doesn't even begin to compare because Abram already in the land of Canaan is a stranger. He's already been a sojourner for quite some time. He's already been out of place, having left his father's house and left behind everything that was familiar in order to obey the Lord's call to go into the land of Canaan. But now that's intensified. Take a look at verse 10. We're told that there was a famine in the land, the land, of course, being the land of Canaan, the promised land, Palestine.

There's a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt. So now he's moving further. He's, he's at least established some sense of familiarity there in the land of Canaan and been able to set up his tents in some different places and even establish places of worship for him and his family there in the land of Canaan. But now he's moving even further and he's moving into a place that's, that is truly a foreign land for him. He's going down to Egypt to sojourn there. And then we're told that the famine was severe in the land. Now, now we, we don't relate quite as well as probably previous generations would have been able to, to the circumstances that Abram is facing here. You know, most famines are caused by drought. But when we experience droughts today, at least in America, for most of us, it doesn't have an immediate impact upon our lives. Oh, the cost of some vegetables and various things might go up.

The cost of meat may even go up because the cost of feeding them has gone up because it's more difficult to grow grain and things in places that we depend upon. But we're not, we're not majorly affected by things. We're still going to be able to eat. We might have to pay slightly more for our food at the grocery store, but we're still going to be able to eat. We'll still be able to turn on the faucet and have a glass of water if we want to do that. We're not, we're not immediately impacted in a major way when there are droughts and famines. But Abram would have been. In fact, if you've kept up with the news over the last several years and even over the last few months, California has just sort of come out of a very severe drought that lasted for a while there. And while the farmers were pretty adversely affected in California, the average citizen had to actually bear the weight of not being able to water their lawns as frequently as they were used to. I mean, it's just not the kind of impact that you see throughout history when a famine hits a place. But for Abram, the impact would have been astronomical.

If there's a famine in the land, if there's a drought leading to famine, then there's no food to be had. It's not as if food is rare. There's no food to be had for Abram, especially as a foreigner in the land of Canaan. Had he been a part of a larger group and a larger tribe, perhaps he would have had access to someone's fields that were still producing, or perhaps they would have had some sort of tribal or family, family stored up wealth and food. But Abram is a sojourner and a stranger even in the land of Canaan. And so he has nothing when this famine hits. He's desperate. And so he goes down to Egypt, where presumably the famine has not hit and where there is abundant supply. But to go to Egypt is to face uncertain circumstances. In fact, it's for Abram to enter into a much more dangerous situation than he has already been in. And because of the famine and because of his being forced to go into the land of Egypt, we now see that Abram begins to operate through fear. He begins to make decisions and he begins to view the world through the lens of the various fears that he has as he goes down to Egypt. So I want you to take a look there and see exactly what is going through his mind.

[11:25] Take a look in verse 11. When he was about to enter to about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai, his wife, I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance. And when the Egyptians see you, they will say, this is his wife, then they will kill me, but they will let you live. So back back in the land of Canaan, they're facing almost certain death through starvation. So they have to go to the land of Egypt so that they can live, so that they can survive. But now Abram is faced with this fear that in the land of Egypt, he himself will be murdered. And the reason that he would be murdered is because the people there would want to take his wife from him. Now, I will be honest with you, as I read through that story, the initial thoughts that I have is, what's wrong with Abram? What is he thinking?

But in reality, his fear was a legitimate fear. It was, in that culture, not uncommon for things like this to happen. If you were a stranger in someone else's land, you didn't have all the normal rights that you would expect to have. You didn't have the protections of family and larger groups around you, at least in the land of Canaan at this point in time. Abram had met some others, most likely. Abram had probably developed some sort of semblance of relationships and ties with others in the land. But now he's in Egypt. There's no such protection to be had for him.

And the most valuable possession that Abraham has in terms of thinking of what he takes with him and all of his family is his wife. He has his wife, who we're told is beautiful in appearance, so much so that Abram's thoughts are, they're going to see her and they're going to want to take her from me. But they will kill me to take her. It's a fearful thought that he has. It's not a ridiculous thought that he has. It's not an out there strange scenario that Abram dreams up. It's a legitimate fear that he has. But nevertheless, this fear begins to take over his thinking and then he begins to act foolishly. I don't think I don't think that his fear is itself a foolish fear for him to have.

But he begins to make decisions that are foolish decisions because of his fear. Take a look at what happens next in the text. Verse 13, this is his plan. It's not a good plan, but it's a plan.

Say that you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you. Now, we get irritated with that, we think, oh, you're planning us to lie. But we'll find out later on in Genesis that it's not really a lie. Sarai is Abram's half sister. Never mind the weirdness of that. He's not technically lying here. All right. He's not technically lying. Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you and that my life may be spared for your sake. That's his thinking. His thinking is that if you say that you are my sister, then they won't kill me to take you. But in fact, what we see is that they they still want to take her. They still they still want Sarai as their own. And specifically, it's people against whom Abram has no defense. Powerful people all the way up to Pharaoh, the king of the land of Egypt. Notice notice what happens. Says that when Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. So she's taken anyway. She's taken away from him. He has not been successful in protecting his wife. He has only succeeded in saving his own life. Now, both of those were his goal. His goal was to preserve his own life and through the preservation of his life to protect

[15:16] Sarai. Notice exactly how things are worded when he speaks to her. Verse 13 once more. Say you are my sister that it may go well with me because of you. So he's going to receive benefit because of her. He's not going to be killed. All right. And that my life will be spared for your sake. So, yes, there is self-interest here on the part of Abram, but it's not entirely self-interest.

He does have in mind her welfare and her ultimate benefit. Apparently, in Abram's mind, if the people think that she is his sister, then they will not be inclined to simply take her by killing him.

In fact, the culture, the custom of the day would have been that they would have had to offer to Abram since her father is not there. And if she's his sister, then Abram would have been in charge. They would have had to have offered to Abram some price for her, a dowry, some sort of bride price.

And you would assume at that point that Abram could simply deny it and say, that's not enough or I don't want that or I'm I don't want to give my my sister away in marriage right now. So he has in mind a plan that conceivably could work.

It's possible that she could benefit from this arrangement. And yet, because word reaches Pharaoh, one to whom Abram could not say no and one who could meet any price that Abram might name. Now he's faced with the situation that his wife has indeed been taken. His life has been spared, but now her life is in danger.

[16:51] She's taken into Pharaoh's house. Now, we might have the tendency to say to ourselves, oh, well, this is just rash thinking on the part of Abram. This was a foolish plan that he came up with because he hadn't thought it out well, because he was operating on the level of fear and he just didn't take time to think it through.

But that's not actually the case. Abram's fear, although it's heightened and intensified by his circumstances, it was a fear that persisted throughout his life.

That in fact, he already had this fear of his wife being taken and him being murdered for his wife. We know that because this is not the only time this sort of thing happens in the book of Genesis.

In fact, it happens again with Abram and Sarah. Turn over a few chapters in your Bibles to Genesis chapter 20, and I want you to see that this is not a last minute rash decision that Abram makes as he gives Sarah these instructions.

In Genesis chapter 20, we find a similar story. It's not happening in Egypt, but it is happening in the southern part of Canaan, in an area that is along the edges and the borders of the promised land, a land called Gerar.

[18:06] And while Abram and Sarah are there, he gives her the same basic instructions and they follow through with the same basic plan. But this time, this time things take a different turn.

And Abram is confronted by the king of Gerar who's named Abimelech. Now listen to what we read in verse 13 of chapter 20. He says, When God caused me to wander from my father's house...

So this is dating back, what Abram's about to say here, dates back to the very beginning of chapter 12, when God first moves Abram to go away from his father's house into the land of Canaan.

So we're predating the events of the second half of chapter 12. This goes back to before he's in Egypt, when he leaves his father's house to go into the land of Canaan. When God caused me to wander from my father's house, I said to her, Abram said to Sarah, I said to her, This is the kindness you must do to me.

At every place to which we come, say of me, He is my brother. So this is a long-standing plan that Abram has in place. Say that he's my brother wherever we go, when we are questioned.

[19:18] Just simply say, He's my brother. Because this fear that he has is a long-standing fear. And this foolish plan that Abram concocts is not some fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants-off-the-top-of-his-head plan that he comes up with here in the middle of chapter 12.

This was a part of his plan all along. And in fact, it appears as though this is what Sarah would say quite frequently as they were traveling and entering into new places.

But thus far, up until they go to Egypt, apparently the plan was working in the land of Canaan. There's no indication in the first half of chapter 12 that there was any real danger presented there for Sarah or for Abram.

We only encounter this in the land of Egypt. So apparently this plan has worked so far. But in Egypt, things go awry.

There's a famine. Abraham's afraid and he acts foolishly. And because of that, we find Sarah in great danger. We find her in a stranger's house.

[20:27] We find Abram, though, bewilderingly benefiting from all of this. Notice verse 16. And for her sake, that is for Sarah's sake, he, the Pharaoh, dealt well with Abram.

And he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels. This most likely is that dowry payment, that bride price.

How did Abram come to be in possession of all these things? We know that he has some possessions already because some possessions are mentioned earlier in Genesis chapter 12. But now there's an emphasis on how much he has in direct connection with the Pharaoh's treatment of him.

So in all likelihood, what we are seeing here in verse 16 is that Abram benefits because the Pharaoh, who now wants Abram's sister to come into his household and be one of his wives, is willing to pay a high bride price for Sarah.

And so in the midst of this, Abram is somehow benefiting. He's been afraid for his life, so he follows this foolish plan. But somehow, Abram begins to benefit. What's happening here?

[21:37] What's happening is God is at work in the midst of all of these circumstances. Because this story in the second half of Genesis chapter 12 is not really a story about Abram's foolishness or his fear.

That's not what this story is about. This story is not written to teach us a lesson about being dishonest or a lesson about not being fearful or a lesson about not making foolish decisions.

That's not what this story is ultimately about. What we see happening in this story is God at work to fulfill His promises in the midst of adverse circumstances.

Notice what you read in verse 17. But the Lord. So God's at work here. God is doing something here. What should we expect Him to be doing?

What should we expect God to be up to? You have to remember the promise of earlier in the chapter. Those who bless Abram will be blessed. Those who curse Abram will be cursed.

[22 : 38] Well, the Pharaoh has stolen his wife. It's difficult to do more harm to a man than that. So what does God do? He fulfills His promise. I said I would curse those who curse you.

I would come against those who cause you any harm in any way. And that's exactly what He does. But the Lord afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife.

So Pharaoh called Abram and said, What is this you've done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say she is my sister so that I took her for my wife? He's confused.

Rightly so. He doesn't understand the situation. And Moses, who's writing this account, doesn't tell us all the details. How did Pharaoh figure this out?

How did he put the pieces together? It could simply be common sense. As soon as I brought her into my house, suddenly we all got sick. It must have something to do with her. Because in that day and age, they wouldn't have thought of looking anywhere else.

[23 : 38] They wouldn't have thought of just diseases and germs the way that we conceive of them. They would have looked around and said, What have we done differently that's brought some God's displeasure upon us?

And the only thing new apparently is Sarah. So it may have been common sense of that day and age. And the Pharaoh may have said, She's new. Something's up and interrogated her. We don't know. But somehow Pharaoh finds out she is in fact Abram's wife.

And this is why the problems have come upon him. He's taken another man's wife. So he's angry. He's upset with Abram. Why did you say she is my sister so that I took her for my wife?

Now then, here's your wife. Take her and go. Get out of my sight. But that's not all that happens, right? No. Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him.

And they sent him away with his wife and all that he had. All that Abram had gained in Egypt, he now kept. All that Abram had, he has sent away with.

[24 : 39] In fact, as you look down in verse 1 of chapter 13, you see this again. So Abram went up from Egypt. He's going back into the promised land. He and his wife and all that he had. All that he had.

So what happens in this story? What is the course of events that we are to notice here? Abram is faced with a famine. He leaves the country.

He concocts a foolish plan that you think cannot possibly work out. Things take a dive. Things look bad for Abram. And yet in the midst of all that, God is working. God blesses Abram now with sheep and oxen and donkeys and all these extra things that he didn't already have.

God restores Sarah back to Abram. He does all of these things in fulfillment of his promises. Because despite Abram's fear and foolishness, God remains faithful to his promises in all of these things.

In fact, I believe that the main point of this story is to emphasize God's providential hand at work throughout the entire series of events.

[25 : 45] I say that because the events that are recorded here are foreshadowing what will happen at the end of the book of Genesis. If you're not familiar with the book of Genesis, then you need to know that the rest of the book of Genesis chronicles the life of Abraham and that of his immediate descendants.

First of his son and then of his grandson and his grandson's sons who make up the twelve tribes of Israel. But as you approach the end of the book of Genesis, events unfold that show God's hand at work.

There is a famine in the land. Severe enough that Abram's descendants go down to Egypt. In fact, the book of Genesis ends with Abram's descendants in the land of Egypt because of the famine.

But God has already been at work to ensure that they will be protected and cared for when they arrive so that God has already sent ahead of them Joseph, one of the great-grandsons of Abram. He's already sent him ahead and he's arrived at a position of power and he's able to provide for his family while they're there.

God is at work in all of these things. God's sovereign hand is moving to take his people where he wants them to be when he wants them to be there. In fact, that's drawn out for us very, very clearly in chapter 15 of Genesis.

[27 : 09] In chapter 15 of Genesis, God makes a covenant with Abram. But he warns him and he tells him, I'm going to send your descendants out of the land that I promised you.

I've promised to give you this land, but I'm going to send your descendants out of the land for 400 years. They're going to Egypt and they will stay there for 400 years.

Because God has a plan in mind. God is going to send the people in Egypt so that they can multiply in Egypt and all the while that the people, the descendants of Abram, the promised people, all the while that they are multiplying in Egypt, the sins of the people who live in the land of Canaan are multiplying as well.

So that when we read a book like Joshua, we find it difficult sometimes to stomach the fact that God would send His people into the land of Canaan to wipe out the people that are there and take their land from them.

And we think, how could you do that, God? Why would you be so cruel and mean to these people just because you promised this land to Abram? And yet God tells Abram in Genesis chapter 15, I'm sending your descendants into Egypt for 400 years.

[28 : 15] Why? Because the iniquity of the people who live in the land is not yet full. In other words, God's plan includes not only the multiplying and the increasing of Abram's descendants in Egypt, but it also includes Him removing what we would call common grace from the people that live in the land of Canaan so that any restraints upon their sinful behavior are taken away.

And they quickly descend into a pattern, a lifestyle that reflects the pattern and lifestyle of the people who lived in the time before the flood came. so that when God brings His people back into the land and He says, go in and exterminate those who are there, those who are being exterminated are as worthy of that judgment as the world was before the flood came upon the scene because God had it in mind all along, yes, to give the land to the people, to the descendants of Abraham, but He would take it from a people who were not worthy and not deserving of it and who in fact who brought upon themselves the judgment that was coming.

In all of this, God's providential hand is at work. And what we are seeing in Genesis chapter 12 is a foreshadowing of God's much greater and much larger plans for human history.

God is always at work to fulfill His promises. He is always at work in ways that we don't see at the time and that we don't understand at the time to bring about some greater good that He had planned from the very beginning.

And when we find ourselves facing all sorts of troubles, when we find ourselves in the midst of painful and difficult circumstances, it is easy, like Abraham, for us to simply focus upon what's happening in that moment to be afraid of the things that we see immediately in front of us and then to try to figure out on our own a way to navigate these difficult paths without considering that this might be God's hand at work.

[30:15] I mean, who brings famines into the world? God does. The prophet Jeremiah speaks in Jeremiah chapter 14 and he says, who among the gods can cause it to rain? And the answer is none.

In fact, he comes back and he says, all these things, that is, the bringing of rain, the causing of crops to grow. Jeremiah says, all these things you do, O Lord. God is in charge of the rain.

God is in charge of the growing of crops. So even the introduction of a famine at the beginning of this story is a sign that God's doing something. He's not a bystander.

He's not watching events unfold thinking, at some point I need to step in here and do something. No, God is sovereign and he's in charge of all of these things the entire time. And Abram didn't see that in the moment.

And we don't see that in the moment. We don't see that when we're facing difficult circumstances, God is actually in the midst of that, demonstrating his faithfulness to us.

[31:15] God's promise to Abram was, those who bless you I will bless, those who curse you I will curse. But as we move into the new covenant, we see that promise applied in new ways to God's new covenant people.

God is still in the business of blessing his people. He is. But he's not merely going to give us sheep and oxen and donkeys the way that he did Abram. In fact, the promise of the new covenant is that God is going to give us greater blessings than he ever gave to his old covenant people.

He's going to put his spirit within us and that spirit will write his law on our hearts and begin to do things within us and not just change the circumstances around us, but he's changing us so that we become more God-honoring, more Christ-glorifying, more joy-filled people because of what God is doing in us.

But just as God works through pain and difficult circumstances in the life of Abram to demonstrate his faithfulness to his promises, he does the same for us. Consider his promises.

You know this one well. Romans 8, verse 28. Where he says, we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good.

[32:34] That's a great and grand promise. What is the good that he has in mind and what are the all things that he's working? Listen to these words from the book of James.

James, chapter 2. Count it all joy. Chapter 1, verse 2. Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds. For you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

And let steadfastness have its full effect that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. What is God doing through the trials of our lives? He is providentially ordering the events of our lives so that he might cause us to grow in Christ.

So that at the end of the day, we may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. But how does all that happen? It happens through these trials, through the testing of our faith. And James says, count that joy because you know the end.

Count that joy because you know what God is doing. You know that He's being faithful to His promises. Perhaps Abram could have counted it a joy to face famine in Canaan and have to go down to Egypt had he simply paused to remember and remind himself that God is sovereign, that God is in control and God will always, always fulfill His promises.

[33 : 55] He is at work. He is at work when you lose your job. He is at work when you have family struggles. He is at work when you become sick. He is at work when those that you love die.

He is at work when there are tensions around you. He is at work in and through all of these things, ordering and providentially arranging the people and the events of your life for your good.

But your good is Christ Himself. And He will arrange and order all of these things in your life so that you might depend more fully upon Him and find in Him greater joy and greater satisfaction than you could ever experience if God were to simply build a wall around you and protect you from all the bad things in the world.

You would never experience the fullness of joy that is to be had in Christ if God fenced you in and protected you from every danger in the world around us.

He doesn't do that for Abram and He doesn't do that for us. He does something better. He fulfills His promises in and through all of these circumstances.

[35 : 11] For all those who love God, all things work for good. For all those who are, Paul goes on to say, called according to His purpose.

So the only question that remains is are you in the position of Abraham? Have you heard the promises and have you received the promises of God? Because Pharaoh suffers as well but it doesn't turn out for his good.

It doesn't. Pharaoh only suffers loss, sickness, and yes, God removes the sickness but he's lost goods and things to Abram and he's had to suffer the shame and embarrassment of taking a married woman into his home.

Pharaoh does not see his ultimate good being worked while Abram does because Abram had heard and believed in the promises of God. God works all things for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purposes.

If you've trusted in Christ and if you've turned away from your sin you belong to Him. Paul tells us in Romans chapter 8 that we have been adopted into God's family and if that's true of you then you can know that everything happening around you even though in the moment there's maybe a dark cloud and you can't see beyond the circumstances you can know and rest with certainty that God is working and He is faithful and He will providentially move to ultimately bring about your good which is to be seen in dependence and joy in Christ.

[36 : 48] But if you do not belong to Him if you have not yet trusted in His promises then you do not know and you cannot sense and feel the comfort of knowing that all of these terrible events might work for your good.

do not face danger without a hope beyond it. Do not face the fears that encroach upon our lives without knowing that there is one who has laid down his life so that he might destroy the devil that is the one who has the power of death so that we should no longer be slaves what does the writer of Hebrews say?

Of fear to death. But what does Paul say when he speaks of adoption in Romans 8? He says that we have been adopted as sons why? So that we should no longer be slaves again to fear.

God has done such a work on behalf of His people that He sets us free into the enjoyment of the certainty of knowing that He is at work even in the worst of our circumstances but that belongs only to those who trust in Christ.

So I appeal to you this morning if you've not trusted in Him trust in Him believe in Him begin to walk with Him and if you do belong to Him and you're facing the cloud in front of you open the word and read the promises and cling to the promises and believe and know that He is at work and He is sovereign and He is always at all times faithful to His promises.

[38:24] Let's pray. do