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Sermon Notes

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The Ancient Origin of Modern Missions: The Call of Abram Genesis 12

Raymond Lull: b. 1232 into a wealthy family in Majorca, Spain... his home island had only recently been taken back from Muslims when he was born; lived a life of utter immorality as a young man in the court of the King of Aragon; yet he was known as a gifted scholar despite his decadence; during his early thirties, he was born again through mystical visions that came to him of the crucified Christ... when it came he was ashamed of the sinful life he'd been leading; soon afterward, he entered a monastery and devoted himself totally to the Lord; but he was living a life of a recluse, as did many monks of his day... then, another vision came and jarred him into missions... he had a vision of himself in a forest meditating, alone, far from all worldly distractions... then, in his vision, he met a traveling pilgrim who chided him for the self-centered life he was living when there was a world that needed the message of Christ!!

It was this second vision that specifically led him to go as a missionary to the Muslim Saracens, the most hated and feared enemies of Christendom. At that time, the Crusade was going on full strength. Lull wrote, **“I see many knights going to the Holy Land beyond the seas and thinking they can acquire it by force of arms, but in the end all are destroyed before they attain that which they think to have. Whence it seems to me that the conquest of the Holy Land ought to be attempted by love and prayers, and the pouring out of tears and blood.”**

Lull was one of the most imaginative, courageous and faith-filled missionaries of all time, BUT he began by being overwhelmed with fear at embarking for Tunis... he boarded at Genoa, with all his luggage, and was suddenly overcome with fear and the thought of being tortured and killed for his faith in Tunis, and he immediately got off the ship and ordered all his things taken off as well!! How embarrassing... but he was overcome by remorse and immediately boarded the next ship for Tunis, in North Africa... he arranged a debate with Muslim clerics, and did an excellent job... but he was thrown in prison, then stoned by a mob... he then disguised himself as a wharf-dweller and witnessed quietly in the city of Goletta

He believed that for every one Saracen he converted to Christianity, ten Christians became Muslims... yet he never tired of his struggle to witness to Muslims

Eventually, after a lifetime of faithful ministry to Muslims, he openly sought martyrdom at age 80 and boldly preached in Bugia in Tunis until an enraged mob stoned him to death on June 30, 1315

Like Boniface and Columba before him

Like the Morvians and William Carey and Adoniram Judson and Hudson Taylor and John Paton and William Borden and countless other missionary heroes after him

They all had one thing in common: they left their country and their families and went to the land God showed them... they followed in the footsteps of faith of their father Abraham

This morning we are standing with two more families who will leave this country and their relatives and go to the land God will show them

The Mangers and the Cauleys will be leaving First Baptist Church to do to distant lands to preach the faith of Abraham, consummated in the Gospel of Jesus Christ

I. The Eternal Gospel: The Knowledge of God to the Ends of the Earth

- A. God's timeless plan
- B. God's methods: working through individual people
- C. Abraham: our "father in faith"

Modern hostility to missions... like a form of cultural imperialism, as though we're "superior" to other nations; "My religion is my own affair!!"

The root of modern missions is the eternal gospel, which proclaims salvation in the name of the One eternal God... and the call of an unknown Semite in Ur of the Chaldees is the beginning of the modern missionary movement

II. God's Call on Abram (12:1)

- A. The Context
 - 1. Who called Abram? The LORD, the creator of heaven and earth

John Stott: "The Lord who chose Abraham is the same Lord who in the beginning created the heavens and the earth, and who climaxed his creative work by making man and woman unique creatures in his own likeness. In other words, we should never allow ourselves to forget that the

Bible begins with the universe, not with the planet earth; then with the earth, not with Palestine; then with Adam, the father of the human race, not with Abraham, the father of the chosen race. Since, then, God is the Creator of the universe, the earth, and all mankind, we must never demote Him to the status of a tribal deity or petty godling like Chemosh the god of the Moabites, or Molech, the god of the Ammonites, or Baal the male deity, or Ashtoreth the female deity of the Canaanites. Nor must we suppose that God chose Abraham and his descendants because He had lost interest in other peoples or given them up. Election is not a synonym for elitism. On the contrary... God chose one man and his family in order, through them, to bless ALL the families of the earth.”

Our faith is a universal faith, good for every nation on the face of the earth!

2. Biblical context

- Genesis 1... creation of universe; Genesis 2... special creation & call of man
- Genesis 3: the Fall of man & the first promise of redemption through the seed of the woman; the “Serpent-slayer”
- Genesis 4-11: devastation effects of sin, as it spread like a cancer
- Gen. 10-11: the scattering of nations, alienation
- Genesis 12: the ingathering would now begin... THE CALL OF ABRAM

B. Abram’s circumstances

1. Country: Ur of the Chaldeans

- a. account a little confusing... other verses bring clarity

Nehemiah 9:7 “You are the LORD God, who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and named him Abraham.”

[Stephen] Acts 7:2-3 “The God of glory appeared to our Father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran: ‘Leave your country and your people,’ God said, ‘and go to the land I will show you.’”

- b. Ur: modern Iraq, 225 miles SE of Baghdad
- c. powerful city, center of southern Babylonian people

2. People: Shemites, “Hebrews”

- a. Descendant of Shem
- b. Also called a “Hebrew”

Genesis 14:13 “Abram the Hebrew...”

- 3. Father’s Household: Terah, Nahor, & Haran
 - a. Also perhaps Shem, Arphaxad, Shelah, Eber, Reu, Serug
 - b. All ancestors still alive when Abram left Ur
- 4. Religious life: Polytheism

Joshua 24:2 “Joshua said to all the people, ‘This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: “Long ago, your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshipped other gods.”

C. God’s Call

- 1. God speaks clearly... but only the believer can hear

Isaiah 1:2 “Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the Lord has spoken.”

John 10:27-28 “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish.”

- a. Abram received a special appearance to go with a special call

Acts 7:2 “The God of glory APPEARED to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia before he lived in Haran...”

- b. this call would shape the rest of Abram’s life!!

- 2. Asks everything... offers everything

Asks everything:

“Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.”

- a. Leave behind everything familiar, everything of value
- b. Become a wanderer on earth with no place to lay your head

- c. Follow the sound of my voice wherever I tell you to go

The life of faith: following the sound of God's voice to regions unknown, trusting only in God's goodness to meet every need

- d. Thus begins Abraham's life of wandering

- vs. 4 "So Abraham left..."
- vs. 6 "Abraham traveled through the land..."
- vs. 8 "From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent..."
- vs. 9 "Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev..."
- vs. 10 "Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while..."
- 13:1 "Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev..."

Genesis 20:13 "When God had me wander from my father's household..."

Hebrews 11:8-10 "By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; lived in tents as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God."

But God OFFERS everything, too!!

III. God's Promises to Abram (12:2-3)

A. Three Promises to Abram:

vs. 2 "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great..."

1. "I will make you into a great nation"

- a. Tremendous promise... later fulfilled through Isaac, Jacob & the Twelve Patriarchs
- b. Deepest desire of Abram's heart

- c. Actually Abram seen to be the Father of many nations
2. "I will bless you"
- a. God's commitment to use His power for Abram's benefit
 - b. Lavish blessing of God's grace

Deuteronomy 28:3-8 "You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country. The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock—the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed. You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out. The Lord will grant that the enemies who rise up against you will be defeated before you. They will come at you from one direction but flee from you in seven. The Lord will send a blessing on your barns and on everything you put your hand to. The Lord your God will bless you in the land He is giving you."

Ephesians 1:3-4 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."

3. "I will make your name great..."
- a. The very thing prideful man seeks... eternal fame
 - b. Stumbling block for those before the flood

Genesis 6:4 "...men of the name"

- c. Stumbling block for the builders of the Tower of Babel

Genesis 11:4 "Come, let us build for ourselves a city with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves..."

- d. Given also to David

2 Samuel 7:8-9 "Now then, tell my servant David, 'This is what the Lord Almighty says: I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men of the earth.'"

- e. Given to all of us in Christ

Revelation 3:5 *“I will never blot out his name from the book of life but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.”*

f. Highest of all, given to Christ

Philippians 2:9-11 *“Therefore God exalted [Jesus] to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.”*

All names, all reputations are secondary to Christ’s... but if God promises Abram that He will make his name great, Abram’s name will be great!!

4000 years later, we’re still talking about Abraham

So... Three Promises to Abram:

vs. 2 *“I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great...”*

B. The Purpose of the Promises

vs. 2 *“[so that] you will be a blessing...”*

1. Abram’s call was for a purpose
2. God’s purpose was UNIVERSAL... worldwide
3. God’s eyes were on the NATIONS

C. The Promises Extended

vs. 3 *“I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”*

1. Abram called out to a special purpose
2. God promised Abram special protection
 - a. all nations either those who blessed Abram or those who cursed him
 - b. God would physically protect Abram

- c. God would bless everyone in direct connection to how they were with Abram
- 3. ULTIMATE BLESSING: Through Abram all nations on earth blessed
 - a. nations those in Genesis 10
 - b. descendents of Shem, Ham, Japheth
- 4. Early proclamation of the Gospel

Galatians 3:8 “The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the Gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you.’”

Galatians 3:16 “The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say ‘and to seeds’ meaning many people, but ‘and to your seed’ meaning one person, who is Christ.”

- a. Abram blessed all nations on earth by producing the Christ
- b. second clear promise after the one in Eden

Genesis 3:15 “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed...”

All this time God has been waiting to advance this promise... now the next phase has begun... the beginning of the Jewish nation; the serpent-slayer would be a descendant of Abram

IV. Abram’s [Delayed?] Obedience & Walk By Faith (vs. 4-9)

A. Faith and Obedience: A Marriage Fit for Eternity

vs. 4 “So Abram left, as the Lord had told him...”

- 1. Just like Noah before him... living in moment-by-moment obedience to God

Hebrews 11:8 “By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.”

- 2. True faith ALWAYS results in radical obedience

Romans 1:5 “[Paul’s] apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.”

Romans 16:26 “...so that all nations might believe and obey him”

3. Abraham our father in faith: set the example; pinnacle was his willingness to sacrifice Isaac

BUT...

B. Obedience of faith grows gradually

1. Call came in Ur, obedience waited ‘till Haran
2. Perhaps waited for his father to die

Genesis 11:31 “...together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there.”

Matthew 8:21-22 “Another disciple said to him, ‘Lord, first let me go and bury my father.’ But Jesus told him, ‘Follow me and let the dead bury their own dead.’”

Matthew 10:37 “Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me...”

3. God had called him to leave his idolatrous father... Abram wanted to wait ‘til his father died
4. Finally, Abram left... his father died in Haran—SIXTY YEARS AFTER ABRAM LEFT!!
 - a. Terah was a pagan
 - b. If Abram had waited for him, he would have missed everything
 - c. Abram was 100 years old when Isaac was born, Terah lived another 35 years!

Sometimes God calls you to make a decisive break with the past... to step out radically by faith, not knowing where you’re going

5. Travelling partners

- a. people: Sarai & Lot; servants as well
- b. possessions

C. Abram’s Journey with God (vs. 6-9)

1. Wandering by faith

vs. 6 “Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem.”

- a. Led step by step through the land... living in a tent
- b. Canaanites in the land; no permanent dwelling to be found

2. God advances the promise

vs. 7 “The Lord appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your offspring I will give this land.’”

- a. Final aspect of the promise
- b. NOW concrete... vs. 1 “Go to the land I will show you”; vs. 7 “This is the place”
- c. Greatest gift of all: face to face fellowship with his God!!

3. Worshipping by faith

- a. As with later promise about offspring, Abram believed God
- b. Altar built to show faith
- c. Like ancestor Seth, he called on the name of the Lord
- d. Like ancestor Noah, built an altar to sacrifice to the Lord

VI. Application

- BE LIKE ABRAHAM!!

Follow his faith for your own salvation

Romans 4:12 “[Abraham] is the father of all those who walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had while he was still uncircumcised.”

Follow his faith for the salvation of others

- Footsteps = path of radical obedience
- “Leave your country”
- Financial commitments
- Total dedication to God’s ultimate purpose

Matthew 24:14 “This gospel of the kingdom will be preached as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

Traditional three-fold call:

Pray... Give... Go

Okay... but Pray with the faith of Abraham

Give with the faith of Abraham (Piper, Desiring God, p. 163-164)