

(Hebrews - Part 35): How Abraham Knew He Was Called

by A.W. Tozer

A.W. Tozer's sermon explores how Abraham's response to God's call exemplifies the critical moments that shape a believer's life and faith journey.

Duration: 33:40

Scripture: Genesis 12:1, Genesis 28:12, Psalm 46:10, Matthew 11:15, Matthew 22:14, John 3:16, Hebrews 3:7

Topics: "Expositional"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the call of God and how it can come to people in various circumstances. He emphasizes that the call of God is for everyone, but not everyone hears it. The preacher gives examples from the Bible, such as Moses and Abraham, who received a clear call from God and were chosen for a specific purpose. He contrasts those who live solely for this world and its concerns with those who have been called by God and have a higher purpose. The sermon encourages listeners to be open to the call of God and to recognize that their true fulfillment lies in following His plan for their lives.

Transcript

Now in Hebrews 11, 8 to 10, By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for inheritance, obeyed. And he went out not knowing whether he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise.

For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Now I haven't selected this for the morning, it comes in consecutive order as we're studying the book of Hebrews these Sunday mornings. Abraham, when he was called.

And I have been thinking about the critical moments that are in the life of people. Naturally the first and most critical moment is the time of our birth. For a birth is a promise, or a warning, or a prophecy, or a portent, or all of those things.

I was thinking that about 72 or 73 years ago there was a family by the name of Schickelgruber, quite a long name. And they'd had some children and then the midwife came out smiling and said to Mr. Schickelgruber, you have a son. And he tried to look pleased, maybe he was.

But he could hear a little thin wail, that little wail that's human and yet not quite like anything human, it's the sound of a newborn baby crying. Now if there had been a prophet there with ability to see the future, I'm sure that he would have heard in the wail of that newborn baby a threat to the human race, I'm sure of it. I'm sure that he would have recoiled in horror at what he was hearing, for that little baby grew up to be Adolf Hitler.

And a little later than that, maybe 20 years later than that, another boy was born in that same family. And they said to the waiting father, it's a boy. And six million Jews might have recoiled at that and the whole world shuddered.

For that boy was Adolf Eichmann, who was personally responsible, so it's charged, and so I think it has been proved, for the murder of about six million human beings made in the image of God, who just a few days ago was hanged by the neck until dead for his crime. And they tried to pay with one dollar. Now those two births, if we think of them on the horror side of the ledger, they were portents and warnings and threats to the human race.

But I think of another family, a man by the name of Jesse had quite a family of boys. There were eight of them, anywhere from good-sized boys, half grown up to tiny little chaps. And then they came out and said to Jesse, you've got another boy.

He might have said, what could, they said, why don't we name him? They had all the names, he'll be the last one. And that was David, the son of Jesse. And if the prophet had been present there that day when they brought the little wriggling pink bitch, trying to work up a cry when there was nothing to cry over, you know how they do, and wailing his little protest to the world.

If there'd been a prophet there who could foresee this, treat him very, very carefully. He's going to keep him, handle him carefully now, because you've got to keep him going and keep him living, because he's going to write the 23rd Psalm and out of the 23rd Psalm, hymn after hymn and anthem. There was a prophecy, this boy's birth.

I say that there are things that are critical and important predictions, and birth is one. And I suppose I couldn't get away from it, this being the month of June. What is so rare as the day in June? Then have ever come wedding days.

And this is the day, the month when people marry, why I would never know that they do. That is, I mean, why they'd choose this month, not why they'd marry, I think. Why they would choose June, but they do.

And that reminds us that getting married is a long way from being the casual thing that people make it out to be in our time. It's very casual now. People get married as they might buy a car or a cottage in the woods, or go for a trip to Maine.

Just something they'll do, and if they don't like it, they won't do it. But under God, and it's odd, isn't it, that nature has so arranged it that when two people are doing the most important, neither one of them can see. You know, both of them are blind, and emotionally so groggy that it's impossible for reason to have any words at all.

And yet it's one of the most important things in the world. But to others of you who are looking forward, I say, don't feed it into it, and don't. I know a young fellow, started running around with a young woman, and everybody began to say they're going to get married, and he heard it, and accepted it, and from that on he

got married.

And while he never told me in so many words, I have every reason to believe that he never planned it that way at all. He was squeezed into it by the pressure of public opinion. Don't allow that to happen, and don't allow merely the desire to get married.

There are lots of worse things than not being married, and one of them is being married to the wrong person. It's a most critical thing. But I say, birth and marriage and the choice of a job and lots of other things, they're very important.

The most vital moment in the life of any man or woman is when Abraham, when he was called. Notice that. When there is a time factor, a mark, you put a stake down, and you say that was the time, Abraham, when he was called.

Abraham was called, and that was the most vital moment in his life. He was nothing compared to most persons. They come into the world like puppies, they're born into the world or hatched like birds, and their education is for life here below.

They're strictly one-worlders. They believe in this world below, and they're educated for it, whether they know it or not, in educating themselves to live with people, to make a living, in the famous five points of Spencer. But it's all for down here.

It's all for this life. There isn't anything to do with God. And the idea of God or the thought of God comes rather remotely, and it sounds unreal, because they've been educated for the world below.

And then to some there comes a critical moment, the call. The time in this circumstance varies very widely indeed. There was Moses, and he was called while he was out keeping sheep under the brow of Horeb.

And God said to him, I have heard the cry. That was Moses. That was one set of circumstances.

Then there was another man by the name of Jacob, and Jacob was in the waste-howling wilderness, running away from a bad situation at home, when suddenly he saw a ladder set up on the earth, and the angels of God ascending and descending on it, and God standing above it. And God spoke to various others. It doesn't make any difference where you are, nor quite when it is, whether it's a holy day or whether it's Monday morning to some people.

Maybe not to all, but to some people. The call of God is for everybody, but not everybody hears it. The scripture asserts this very clearly, that most persons, they know it in a way, but it never becomes an incident.

And that is true of most Christians. It is never anything that takes place. It is something they know vaguely, but that's about it.

Then comes that one clear call, and they do hear it then. If it's to that, that man does hear it. Many live and die and never hear it, but some do hear it.

Abraham heard it. If there was no other reason why you ought to get still and wait once in a while, it is maybe God's been trying to get you when your line's busy. Maybe God's been trying to reach you and can't because you've been preoccupied.

This American idea that has certainly come over to Canada too, that the go-getter is your man. The go-getter, the man who never to be still. He's your man.

He's your man who will turn the world over. An old Quaker lady, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, was boasting to her in a good-natured way, how he'll live. He said, when I get up in the morning, while I am memorizing Greek, while I am shaving, I am memorizing something else.

And while I'm at breakfast, then he has something else he was doing. And she listened unimpressed. And it's necessary sometimes that we stop and think.

Some of the most useful things you can do is to do nothing at all for a little bit. Sometimes you can go the fastest by not going at all. And you can go the farthest by standing still.

And you can talk the loudest by not saying a word. Abraham was down in Ur the Chaldees, and tradition says he was an idol-maker in the home of his father. Of course, he knew not Jehovah, the God that we say now, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

He was not yet the God of Abraham, but he was listening. He was hearing. Some busy people cannot hear.

I know people that are so socially minded that they will be in misery if they are by themselves. One young fellow said to his father, a doctor. He was in the hospital, this young chap.

He said, Dad, bring me a record player. Something, he said. If I don't, because he lived the kind of life he had lived, it was hell to think that Abraham didn't find it hell.

I don't know how much Abraham had to do with all this. We will allow the Calvinists and Arminians to argue this all out. I believe that God is always previous, and I believe in prevenient grace, and I believe that if God hadn't moved toward Abraham, Abraham never would have moved toward God.

I believe that. But I also believe that if Abraham had not had his ear cocked to another world than this, he would never have heard the voice of Abraham when he was called. What a critical moment that was in the life of Abraham! If Abraham had set his jaw and said, I'm not going to fool with this religion business, and had gone back making bigger and better idols, the whole history of the world would have been a different market, and different for the worse.

It says here that Abraham was called, that one, and he was called to go out. Now, Abraham was negative. Abraham was called to go out.

He was called to go out. Is that so? There he was, but the place where he was wasn't the right place. He was in Ur making idols, and that wasn't the right place for him.

Eternal God had something better for him, so he called him out. Ur was not God's place for Abraham. In order to become a friend of God, he had to go out.

Now, there is the offense of the cross. Nobody cares how religious you are, particularly in this present moment, in this what they call the intellectual ferment that's going on now. As a boy on the farm, I know what happens when things ferment, and I'm a little worried about that expression.

But this moment we're in now, this cross, it's quite respectable now to be religious, though I well remember not too long ago, after the First World War, when it was highly unrespectable to be a believer in God. Now, at last, we have made terms with religion, and the world says it's all right to believe, provided you don't believe anything very much, and provided what you believe doesn't change you very much, and again, provided what you believe doesn't reflect unkindly upon somebody that doesn't believe. Catholics, Jews, Gentiles, atheists, unbelievers can all get together on a panel discussion with the idea that each is expressing his viewpoint, and then shake hands and go out and have a soda.

Nothing matters much anyhow. Whether Jews are right, or the Catholic and the Pope are right, or whether the Protestant gospel groups are right, or whether the atheist is right, that's nothing to worry about. The point is, we've fermented.

We have had the dialogue, we have aired our beliefs like budgies in a cage, talking to each other but not knowing what we're saying. So, Christianity is all right, provided you don't let it become exclusive. Christianity is perfectly all right, just so long as you don't say, this is the only religion there is, and Christ is the only hope there is, and through Christ alone men reach God.

As soon as you say that, you're dead. They say, he's a dogmatist, take him out. They'll have nothing to do with the fellow after that, because he dares to believe not that there are several ways to heaven, but one way.

And one thing the call of Christ does to us, one thing the call of Christ does is to call us out. Abraham, when he was called, he was called to go out. So he was called to go out, because where he was wasn't the right place.

I'll tell you this again, I told you this a couple of years ago now, but I want to repeat it. Some of you know the Irish evangelist who has just now gone to heaven, maybe less than a year ago, by the name of Billy Nicholson. Now, I personally knew Billy Nicholson, he was one of my good, warm friends.

But he was a great man, he was one of the greatest evangelists of his day. Saved Ireland, they tell us, from one people to God by the other. Well, he was called to go to a certain church.

Now, I'm not going to mention the name of that church, if I can help it, but if it slips in, I won't be too sure. They called him in and they said, we'd like to have you put on an evangelistic service here. He said he'd be glad to do it.

Well, the pastor after he got there, one thing about it, Mr. Nicholson, he said, we live in this town, it's a liquor town. And he said, some of my people are, he said, in fact, the chairman of the board of the church. And he's also the town undertaker.

And he said, I'd just like not to say anything about liquor. Well, that first night the brother got up, Billy Nicholson got up and preached on John 3.16. He didn't mention anything, only the love of God. And the pastor said, well, won't this be wonderful? We'll get all of evangelism, evangelistic men up to the edge of the platform.

And he said, ladies and gentlemen, I understand that you have a man on the board of your church who makes liquor to damn people's souls. And he said, also, he's an undertaker so that he can bury them when they die and go to hell. And then he let in from there on.

That was Billy. They closed the church on him and locked the door. Billy never got another chance at that church.

He told me that was the only time he'd ever been locked out. Well, you see, if Billy had just allowed them to drop in their liquor, if he had just allowed them to stew in their gin, they'd never have done that. But that was Billy Nicholson.

And as soon as they went back to not being and don't make it mean much, nobody will bother us. But as soon as we've been preached at the call, they'll get on us right away. But Abraham was called to go out.

But I want you to notice another thing, too. Another preposition lies alongside of that one. He was called to go out into.

Here's the difficulty in some churches. They're always against something and never for anything. The only reason I'm ever against it, I am for something, and that makes it necessary.

So Abraham was against idol making in order that he might be on the side of God. God called him to go out into, said, Abraham, come and I will show thee the land. So the call of God is always into.

Keep that in mind. God calls you into what? He calls you into eternal life. He calls you into holiness of living.

He calls you into fellowship with his son. He calls you into a life of fruitfulness and usefulness. He calls you into purity of the heart.

He calls you to walk within as Enoch walked with him. He calls you into. And he calls you into the sweetest fellowship in all the world, the fellowship of Christians.

He calls you into something, but in order to do it, he has to call you out of where you are, because where you are isn't the right place. You were born on the right. And then remember, too, that what he calls you away from isn't anything compared to what he calls you into.

Lecture 11 Justification and Sanctification 22 I get a lot of sour amusement out of these half-converted opera stars and half-converted singers who tell about how they nobly gave up at the altar. Beating the bench with tears, they gave up an opera career. They couldn't sweep off the stage.

But they gave up an opera career to follow the Lord, and to give the impression that the Lord should reward them particularly because of what they gave up. Well, granted, now, granted they gave something up. I've never met one yet that gave up anything.

Always they couldn't quite make good. A fellow that can't sing a lick well enough to sing an opera can always manage to stagger by in churches. And the man who is unable to toot a horn, they wouldn't have him even in jazz orchestra.

He can talk to the Young People's Society and get a reputation and be called around. He says, I gave up. You know what you gave up, Junior, God bless you? You didn't give up anything.

God called you to himself. What did I give up when I got converted? I gave up the rubber factory. I was working making tires in a rubber factory, and I gave that up.

I was scared half to death, and I gave that up. I was miserable and gave that up. I was covered with sin and I gave that up.

I had ambitions to do so many things, none of which I ever would have accomplished, and I gave that up. But what did I get called into? Well, I gave up certain friends, I admit that. I gave up certain friends.

Now, I didn't have the experience in order that I might be a Christian, because I met my wife in the basement of a Methodist church, and I hadn't had any girlfriends before that, so that was out. But I didn't give up anything that was worthwhile, but what I got was everything. If God takes away from you an old beat-up dollar bill and hands you back the mint, and says, here, the mint's yours, help yourself, God called Abraham out from making idols.

If Abraham had ever thought to grumble about it, God would lay him go back and make idols. But God called him out and said, kings are in your loins, you will be the father of the Messiah. Down the long line from Abraham on down to Mary, you will be in line for the Messiah.

Now, the blessing that came to him because he got out. Now, that's the only reason I tell people that they ought to get out from the world, in order that they might get in. You know, the Puritans, they used to say about them, I don't think it was true at all, but they used to say about the Puritans that they opposed bear baiting.

And they said they didn't oppose bear baiting because they pitied the bear, but they opposed bear baiting because they didn't want the people to have any fun baiting bears. I believe that that is a scurrilous remark and don't believe it's true. But I have met people who, I'm afraid, were just a little bit on that bear baiting side of things.

They were always against it. I got a letter and now I've got a bunch of books. I'm going up to Minnesota in between Sundays, and of all things I'm going to preach on the baptism of the Holy Ghost.

And who do you suppose I'm preaching it to? A bunch of Lutherans. They invited me to come and was taking me to task, warning me and telling me not to go near those Lutherans. I said, don't you do it.

They're not Orthodox. I can't help it. Imagine, will you, if you were to call up a doctor and say, don't go near that man, he's sick.

Don't go near him, he's sick. Of course, that's why the doctor goes. I'm saying to a schoolteacher, don't you go near that little boy.

He can't read. We should go there to teach him to read. And so my good Lutheran friends, I hadn't ever met them.

I know one fellow among them. Outside of that, I know nobody. But I'm going up there and preach a series of sermons on the Holy Ghost.

I preached here at Avenue Road Church. This man that wrote me, he warned me. He said, don't you know they're using you? He said, they're going to use you.

I don't know how they can use me. I've never been used yet. And I'm too old to start now.

But I'm going to preach on God, the Holy Ghost, and what he can do in the lives of men that let him. And I'm going to tell them what God calls them into. And I say, come out, come out, in order that you might get in.

Now, Abraham obeyed, and I'm finished. Abraham obeyed. By faith, Abraham obeyed.

Faith gave him the grand courage to go out, to leave all the old safe mess, his pension, and his seniority, and that comfortable chair, and the change, and the loss, and the human uncertainty that came to him. He became a pilgrim now, to wait and to look upon God. Lost his Social Security, lost his friends at his age.

At his age, every piece of furniture in the house fit him. You know, if you sit in a long enough, they come to fit you. Everything fit him around there.

Everything was comfortable. You know, just where to sit and when, and everybody knew what Abraham would do. God said, I want you to get out of this whole comfortable place and follow me.

Abraham had good spiritual sense enough to obey God. He got up and went. He went because the scripture says, and says it so much more beautifully than I have said it.

It says, because he regarded the city, because he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. He never did quite believe in the permanency of the city where he lived. Err.

He never quite believed in the permanency of that home of his. Never. Never quite believed in the permanency of the job of making idols.

Something in his heart, placed there by God, disturbed him and made him discontented and troubled. And when God said, Abraham, come out, he went immediately and followed God. As Bud Robison said, Abraham went out not knowing where he was going, but he knew who was going with him.

And that's all you have to know. He looked for a city. He was interested in something that has permanence, whose builder and maker is God.

That's life's summum bonum. The end after which the human race strives and doesn't know it. Jerusalem, wrote the old monk, Jerusalem the golden, with milk and honey blessed, beneath thy contemplation sink heart and voice oppressed.

I know not, oh I know not, what social joys are there, what radiancy of glory, what wealth beyond compare. Abraham saw that way back there. Jesus said, Abraham saw my day and was glad.

He looked at the city and he left his little town. And he went out with no town, nothing but a tent, because he was seeing a city. And as he went, he might have said, for thee, oh dear, dear country, mine eyes their vigils keep.

For very love beholding thy happy name they weep. The mention of thy glory is unkind to the breast, and medicine, and sickness, and love. He dedicated himself to eternal things, and I don't have to make a case for it.

The long, glory-studded history of Abraham is its own justification. God bless the man who heard a voice, who obeyed it, who went out and in, in obedience to a heavenly call. God make us like Abraham, at least in this.

Amen.

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