

The Journey

by Jim Cymbala

The sermon emphasizes the importance of faith and trusting God, using the example of Abraham's journey to illustrate the need to leave the old and follow God.

Duration: 24:08

Scripture: Genesis 12:1-2, Genesis 12:4, Matthew 6:33, Mark 16:15, Acts 16:31, Romans 4:3, Hebrews 11:6

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes that Abraham did not have a Bible, but God still spoke to him and guided him. The preacher encourages the audience to be open to God's approaches, whether through dreams, songs, or the words of a child. The sermon emphasizes the importance of receiving and holding onto God's promises, as they have the power to transform and bless our lives. The preacher challenges the audience to seek a deeper spiritual movement and not settle for a mundane Christian life.

Transcript

Here's an interesting question. When did religion begin? Some people think religion began when Moses went up on Mount Sinai, got the Ten Commandments, and he came back down with the plan for the tabernacle, where the worship would be done and the animals would be sacrificed, and the choir would sing. Other people say, no, religion began when Jesus came.

God revealed himself truly, and that's true, when Jesus came and began to make disciples. Religion began in Acts 2, when the Spirit was poured out and the church began. Some people make the argument, no, religion, God's followers, is more primitive.

It began in Genesis 3 when the Bible says, and then men began to call on the name of the Lord. No Bible, no buildings, but some instinct came in them that God was not just creator, but you could call on God. You could ask God for help.

You could praise God. It says there, at the end of chapter three, then men began to call on the name of the Lord. I think a great argument can be made that God's plan for us was really revealed in Genesis the 12th chapter, verses one and two, with the call of Abraham.

Abraham, who's the father of the Jewish people, was also the father of other peoples through having children with other women. He is also called, in the Bible, the father of everyone who believes. Everyone

who's a Gentile or a Jew who believes in Christ, in a way, their spiritual father is Abraham.

Abraham is more important than Moses, who got the law 400 years after Abraham was approached by God. 400 years later, way longer than the United States as a country, was Moses get the commandments and the law. But Abraham is called the friend of God, and he has a unique place in even the New Testament, where in Galatians and Romans, Paul goes to him to show God's way of salvation.

What is that way of salvation? It's not obeying the law. 82% of all the people in America still believe that if you live a good enough life, you'll go to heaven. 82%.

Even people who go to church don't understand God's plan of salvation. If I live a good life, and they usually compare themselves with somebody who's lived a really wretched life, they say then that qualifies you to go to heaven, but nobody is qualified to go to heaven. I bowed on my knees and cried, I said, holy, there won't be one person there who lived a good enough life to go to heaven.

Anyone who goes to heaven, who is a child of God, is there because they become part of God's family through faith in Jesus Christ. Not trying to obey, for by the works of the law, no one will be justified. Not one person.

In fact, the law was given 400 years after Abraham so that sin could be shown so sinful. That's the only reason the law was given. The law tells me God is holy, and it tells me I'm a wretch, but it has no power to even lift one finger to help me.

The law just says, curse it is everybody who doesn't obey all these things. And the soul that sinneth shall surely die. End of story.

That's where Moses can take you, that's all. Ah, but Abraham who came earlier was God's original plan, the plan of faith. For it said about Abraham, Abraham believed God.

Believed what? Believed what God told him. And his faith was counted for righteousness. He didn't have a perfect righteousness, but his faith, his trust in God, was accepted as a right standing before God.

And this, of course, is what Jesus and the apostles taught us. Go into all the world and preach the gospel, the good news. He that believeth shall be saved.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you'll be saved. Not obey 400 commandments and you'll be saved. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you'll be saved.

God's looking for trust, he's looking for faith. For without faith, it's impossible to please God. You can cry a river of tears and make all kinds of vows like I did as a teenager.

I'm gonna change, I'm gonna change, I'm gonna change. You won't change. Only God can give you the power to change.

But that power doesn't operate until you trust him. The just shall live by faith. So Abraham was the one, the friend of God, who initiated this way of faith.

Let's see four simple little things from these two verses. Genesis 12, the first mention really of Abraham in a specific way. 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.

I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you. I will make your name great and you will be a blessing. The Lord had said to Abram, leave your country, your people, your father's household, and go to the land.

What land? I will show you in the future somewhere. I will make you, I'm gonna change you, I'm gonna make you into a great nation. This is an old man with a barren wife and he's now gonna be the father of a great nation.

He can't have one child. And I will bless you. I will open the windows of heaven and I will help you in every way and I will make your name great and you will be a blessing.

I will bless you so you can be a blessing. You can't be a blessing to anyone until you first are blessed by God. You can't pass on something you don't have.

So what do we learn about this? What do we learn about God? What do we learn about faith? What do we learn about the real beginning of God's purpose for our lives? Number one, Abraham was not looking for God. God was looking for Abraham. In some moment that we don't know anything about, we just are told by the writer of Genesis, and the Lord had said to Abraham, leave and go and here's what I'll do for you.

God loves us so much and wants to show his glory and power through our lives. He's the one looking for us. Abraham wasn't looking for him.

He wasn't a man of prayer. In fact, he was an idolater. We find out that he and his ancestors bowed down to stones and figures of wood.

And yet God mysteriously, sovereignly comes to this man and starts making promises. I'm gonna change you. You can be, there's something better for you and I'll do it for you.

Will you believe me? I'm gonna bless you in ways you can't imagine. I'm gonna lift you up so that you can bless others. Why? Not because of anything in Abraham, but because of what's in God.

And God is speaking to all of us. You might not be a born again Christian. Don't you know that God is speaking to you? Don't you hear it through a song? Don't you hear it through a sermon? Don't you sometimes feel it? A small voice in your heart saying, I have something better for you.

I have peace instead of your turmoil. I have joy instead of your depression. Listen to me, I'm coming to you because I love you.

You might not be looking for me, but I'm looking for you. What an awesome God we have. He's looking for us.

Aren't we here, all of us today? Aren't we here because God went searching for us? Not because we've been so perfect in searching for God. How many can say that's true? God was looking for me, searching for me. So the first thing we learn about faith and it fits in with the New Testament verse, faith comes by and hearing by, but there was no Bible for Abraham.

Abraham had no Bible. God came to him the way he did at that time and began to speak to his heart or appear to him at times. And what you and I do when God approaches us, when you hear a choir song that does something in your heart, all those approaches of God, a dream, something a child says, God can use anything.

It's what you and I do with that that's gonna determine our destiny. Jesus said, go into all the world and preach the gospel. The one who hears and believes shall be saved.

The one who says, no, I'm not going anywhere. I don't wanna change, how about that? Or I don't believe in this God, they're lost. That's the way it is.

Anyone who receives that word, that word of promise, when it's received and held in the heart, it has its own power to begin to change us, make us more like Christ, bless us, new blessings, new peace, new joy, new provision from God that you never even knew could exist. It happens when you put your trust in God. Let's talk about us believers.

God is speaking to us. He spoke to me Friday night as I sat, stood, kneeled, whatever, as I was sitting right over here, the Lord began to speak to me. I'm not done with you yet.

You have a long way to go. I wanna change you. I wanna bless you with blessings that you don't even know about.

And I wanna make you a greater blessing. The people deserve a better pastor than you. I'm gonna change you if you'll trust me, not if you'll try harder.

That's death, that's Moses, that's the law. But if you'll trust me, if you'll believe, Abraham believed God, and it was not only counted to him for righteousness, but supernatural things happened in his life only through faith. Now, what we do with those still small voices, what we do when God speaks to us is the fulcrum that's gonna determine the future days of our life and our children and our children's children.

Our children, I want my children to grow up around a man of faith. I want my grandchildren to look at their papa and say, he trusted God, not he made a good living, he bought me sneakers. But no, he and his wife believed in God, they trusted God.

That's the heritage. I want you, when you come to church here, to be men and women of faith. I want you to grow in faith, because when you grow in faith, isn't that fulfilling what the Bible says? From faith to faith, from glory to more glory, from strength to strength.

So we learn, just this one and two put together, faith begins by hearing something from God. In a Bible study, reading it, because now we have scripture. But it's just not reading it mentally.

The Holy Spirit has to make it alive in your heart, and you have to grasp it. Number two, we learned that God came to Abraham not because Abraham deserved it, but because God is gracious, God is loving. I'm here today because of God.

I was remembering at the nine o'clock service, I used to cut school all the time. High school, Erasmus Hall. My sophomore year, I just cut school.

Hid it from my mother and father, lied like a rug. Would get convicted and go to church on Sunday, would go to the altar. I knew that was wrong, and I knew I was gonna get caught.

Prayed, cried, did I mean it? Of course, now I'm gonna go to school tomorrow. I didn't. I cut again, and don't laugh at me.

Some of you did the same thing. What are we talking about here? Come on, how many have dealt with battles in your life where you made all the promises in the world and you broke them? Come on, can we be honest, lift our hands up? I didn't understand faith. I didn't understand trust God.

I thought you do first, then God comes. Not God comes and then you do different. I had it backwards, good part of my young life, but God never gave up on me.

My older brother was a model child. My younger sister was my father's favorite. In his will, he gave her more than the rest of us, my two brothers, hid it from everyone.

It is what it is. But guess what? God loves me. He never gave up on me.

How many have a similar testimony? You just, right, and at your weakest moments, God just keeps coming, making promises. When I've hated myself, he just lifts, he lifts you up. So let's close.

So faith starts by hearing something from God and receiving it, and it has nothing to do whether you merit it. Nobody merits anything. God gets all the praise because he comes despite who we are.

Is it not interesting that the first words spoken to Abraham in the entire Bible is not a promise nor a moral command? It's not I will do this, and it's not don't kill, don't commit adultery, you know what it is? It's leave, leave your country, leave your people. He lived in Ur of the Chaldees. If you look, and this was the map, here's Ur of the Chaldees, where basically Iran is, and those countries.

He was there, and God says, you gotta leave, and he ended up going there to Haran and then to come across here, and here was the sliver of land of Israel. God says, you gotta leave. I got something better for you than what you have.

I got something better than your people. I got something better than this food that you're used to eating since you were a kid. I got something better, but if you're gonna try, trust me, you have to obey me by faith and leave.

How would it be when you're in your 70s to pick up everything and leave, and you don't know where you're going, and you have no protection, and you have no armies, and you have no weapons, and the Bible says that God had spoke to Abraham and said, leave your country and your people and your father's household, and go to a place that I will show you. Now, what did that mean for Abraham? What does it mean for us? To Abraham, it meant leave where I am and go out. Where are you heading, Abraham? I don't know, but God is with me.

Well, how will you know when you get there? I don't know, but he told me to leave. It's pretty scary, isn't it? It's not. It's scary when you stay, because once you put your hand in God's hands, you don't have to know anything.

It's all gonna work out. When you don't, when you refuse that hand and say no, I'm gonna stay in my comfort zone, now all hell is gonna break loose. So he left.

What does it mean to us today? Well, to the person who's not a believer today, what does the gospel say? Leave that way of living. Leave sin. Leave selfishness.

Turn from that and come to God. Leave that lifestyle. Leave it.

If you believe in me and trust me, then trust me enough to obey and leave it. And anybody who leaves and turns to Christ is saved. What does it mean to us believers? Like what the Lord spoke to my heart, and I believe he's speaking to a lot of you here.

How are you gonna ever be what God wants you to be unless you're willing to leave what you're used to? Leave the way you are. Leave that Christian life that you've been living for the last 10 years. Some of us haven't changed in 10 years.

No more faith than you had 10 years ago. Some even less. No more of the Bible in your life than you had 10 years ago.

No greater blessing than you had 10 years ago. This is God's plan for our lives? No, the Christian life is always about leaving. The moment Abraham left and he went up here and then he came down and settled in Israel, the Bible mentions a couple times he never built a house.

He only lived in a tent because he was always moving. That's what the Christian life is. This is why so many are dormant and churches are dead and you can't have a prayer meeting and so few people find Christ as their savior.

It's because people settle down and say, this is our Baptist way or this is our Assembly of God way or this is our Brooklyn Tabernacle way. And the moment you settle, death comes. Death comes.

Because the life of faith is a life of always, what's the next thing you have for me, God? Thank you for the blessings of the past, but I want more. I want everything you've planned for me. Can we say amen to that? I want everything you have.

So to leave is to say, I'm tired. I'm tired of Jim Cimbala, I'll be honest with you. I'm gonna be a better pastor.

I'm gonna be a better husband. I'm gonna be a better person. Why? Not because of me, because I wanna leave.

I wanna leave where I am. Some of you are settled now. Some of you are even putting down foundations to live where you're at.

Don't live there. God has something better. Well, how do you know, Pastor Cimbala, how God has blessed me already? I know he has, but he has something even better.

But you gotta be sick and tired of being sick and tired. You gotta wanna move. Last word.

You gotta leave and go. Where do you go? I don't know. Don't try to define it.

Don't put a picture in your mind. Just hold his hand. I'm trusting you.

Help me, Jesus. I heard a preacher say this week somewhere, the greatest prayer you can pray, and sometimes the simplest one for all of us, is just, oh, God, help me. God, help me.

Help me to step out in faith and not be afraid. Help me not to settle down in my Christian rut that I might be in now. Help me to be fluid and mobile and agile in my faith.

Help me to be seeking you. Help me to move and follow you wherever you wanna lead me. But God, give me the faith of Abraham.

Don't let me be stuck in the mud. Christianity is in decline in America because in too many cases, people have settled into religious denominational traditions. This is the way we do it.

You can't serve God that way. You can't put the Holy Spirit in a box. You gotta be alive and ready to move.

Come on, can we say amen to that? For those of you visiting, Brooklyn is called the borough of churches because back in the day, there were thriving churches all over Brooklyn, and now most of them are empty. Why? Because instead of walking by faith, they said, this is who we are. This is how we do it.

Instead of, oh, God, let me move where you want me to move. Let me go. I'm not talking about a physical movement.

He might want you to move. He might raise you up to do a ministry, but the movement I'm talking about is spiritual movement. God, I'm tired of settling for the way I live.

Come on, some of you up in the balcony. Is not God talking to you through me today? Isn't God talking to me through me to you up in the balcony? Aren't you tired of just go to church on Sunday, then go out, and then the same old, same old all week long? Is that the best God has for you? Is that why Christ died for you? You way up on the top. Is that why Christ died for you to live the way you're living? The way I'm living? Or does he have something better for us? And it'll be supernatural.

Abraham went out not knowing where he was going, but he ended up having children way past when you can have children. Because with God, nothing is impossible. Let's bow our heads.

Lord, we thank you for your word today. And we wanna just say thank you for loving us so much. Thank you for coming after us.

We were not looking for you. You're the lover of our souls. So patient, so kind.

We haven't deserved any of your blessings, and we tell you that openly. For God, you know who we really are. Thank you for such mercy.

And now God, we pray that you'll make us men and women of faith. So that we can make you happy. You want us to trust you.

In different ways, you're speaking to different people throughout the auditorium and across the street. And whatever you're saying to us, help us, Lord, to receive that and to believe it, to trust you. When you speak to us and tell us to leave, help us to be stirred up in our hearts and wanna leave where we're at so we can get to the place you have prepared for us.

And we're not talking just about heaven. You have something better for all of us, starting with the speaker. Today we say, I'm leaving by faith.

I'm putting my hand in God's hand, and he's gonna take me to that new place of blessing, of freedom, of being a blessing, of change, of transformation, of supernatural provision. It all happens when we walk with you. Abraham saw it, and so will we.

So help us to leave whatever might be pulling us down, the cares of life, materialism. Help us to say adios. We're gone.

And help us to have the faith to go, not knowing where we're going. We don't know where you'll lead us, but that's okay as long as you're with us, Lord. If you're with us, we don't care where you take us.

But if you don't go with us, don't let us leave. I thank you for all that you've done in this meeting. They didn't even need to hear me speak, but God, I do thank you for your word today.

Now bless all the people. Shine your face upon them, and grant all the people here shalom, peace of God. Let there be a deep tranquility in every heart today, Lord, and joy too.

We pray this in Jesus' name and every heart. Amen. Everyone said.

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