

(Genesis) 24 - the First Great Pilgrim Father

by S. Lewis Johnson

The Christian life is a pilgrim life, characterized by faith, obedience, and a focus on the heavenly realm.

Duration: 50:44

Scripture: Genesis 12:4

Topics: "Abraham"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the life of Abram and highlights three key aspects. Firstly, the promises of God played a significant role in Abram's life, as he believed and trusted in them. The preacher references Hebrews 11 to emphasize the importance of faith in God's promises. Secondly, Abram embarked on his journey based on the Word of God, demonstrating his obedience and faith. Lastly, Abram lived as a pilgrim and stranger on earth, just like Christians are called to do. The preacher draws a parallel to John Bunyan's 'The Pilgrim's Progress' to illustrate this concept.

Transcript

The scripture reading for this morning is from Genesis chapter 12, and we're reading verses 4 through 9. Genesis chapter 12 and verse 4, we read, So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. And Abram took Sarah his wife, and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the persons which they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan.

Thus they came to the land of Canaan. And Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. The word Moreh is a word that in Hebrew means teacher, and so it is possible that this is the name of a man, the oak of Moreh.

It also may be a place. It was evidently a landmark, and it is mentioned in that way in the text. Now the Canaanite was then in the land.

And the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to your descendants, literally again the word is seed, to your seed I will give this land. So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him. Then he proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent with Bethel on the west, and Ai on the east.

And there he built an altar to the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD. You notice that throughout this section the word that is used for God is the word LORD, or Yahweh, or Jehovah. It is the covenant keeping God with whom Abram is dealing at the moment.

May the LORD bless this reading of his word. The subject for the twenty-fourth of our studies in the book of Genesis is the first great pilgrim father. The Christian life.

What picture does the phrase suggest? The happy life, the doer life as the Scots live it. Perfect serenity, inner turmoil and outer peace. Who is its ideal protagonist and prototype? A monarch, a minister, a jet setter with all the keys of life hanging at his girdle.

The classic illustration of the Christian life in the word of God is Abram, the patriarch. He's not the perfect example. The Lord Jesus is the perfect example, but Abram is the classic illustration among mere mortals.

Our Lord didn't come as a lord, and Abram did not come as a lord, or a monarch, or even a minister. Abram, surprisingly, was a pilgrim. A pilgrim.

A wanderer. A man, to use Webster's definition, a man on a journey to a holy place. A pilgrim.

No doubt about it, the genuine Christian is a pilgrim. And in the Old Testament, as well as in the New, that is stressed. The apostle Peter, in the first of his letters, addresses his letter to those who reside as aliens or as pilgrims scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, and other places in Asia Minor.

In the second chapter and in the eleventh verse, he says, Beloved, I urge you as aliens or as pilgrims and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul. David, in the Old Testament, speaks in a similar manner. He says, For we are sojourners before thee, and tenants as all our fathers.

Our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope. We are sojourners before thee. As far as the scriptures are concerned, then the Christian is a pilgrim.

Abram was a pilgrim. The Christians were exhorted to live like pilgrims and strangers here upon the earth. John Bunyan is the author of The Unforgettable Allegory, and from his Immortal Dreamer, he has given us a wonderful description of the pilgrims as they make their way through the town Vanity, in which was Vanity Fair on their way to the Celestial City.

Mr. Bunyan writes, Now these pilgrims, as I said, must needs go through this fair. Well, so they did. But behold, even as they entered into the fair, all the people in the fair were moved, and the town itself, as it were, in a hubbub about them.

And that for several reasons. For first, the pilgrims were clothed with such kind of raiment as was diverse from the raiment of any that traded in that fair. The people therefore of the fair made a great gazing upon them.

Some said they were fools, some they were bedlams, and some they were outlandish men. Secondly, and as they wondered at their apparel, so they did likewise at their speech, for few could understand what they said. They naturally spoke the language of Canaan, but they that kept the fair were the men of this world, so that from one end of the fair to the other they seemed barbarians each to the other.

Thirdly, but that which did not a little amuse the merchandisers was that these pilgrims sat very light by all their wares. They cared not so much as to look upon them, and if they called upon them to buy, they would

put their fingers in their ears and cry, Turn away mine eyes from beholding Vanity, and look upwards, signifying that their trade and traffic were in heaven. It is fair to say that down through the history of the world the pilgrims have marched.

Abraham, the first of the great pilgrims, the Davids, the Jeremiahs, the Peters, the Johns, the Polycarps, the Augustines, the Tyndals, the Husses, the Luthers, the Calvins, the Whitefields, the Martins, the Livingstons, the Hudson Taylors, and so on down through the years. In sacred and unbroken succession, to use a phrase that F. B. Meyer has used, they made the great confession that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. What are the essential features of the pilgrim life? Well, they include the simple dress.

The Bible makes a great deal over that. The girded loins. We're always ready to leave, are we not? The loose hold on gold.

Now I, of course, think it's good for us to attend a financial economics seminar, but they didn't attend any such seminars. They had a very loose hold on the things of this life. Unconcern about the approval and applause of the world.

The heaven-directed affections. The hurried journey to the mansions above. These are things that characterize the pilgrims.

They experienced insecurity, and they experience insecurity. Uncertainty, hardship, failure, but they have some great consolations. They have the consolation of the presence of God, and they have the consolation of the manifestations of God to them through the Word and through the activities of the Holy Spirit.

Abram was a pilgrim, and he's the great illustration of the Christian. When we talk about the Christian life, we ought to begin right here. It's a pilgrim life.

And incidentally, in one sense, it is fair to say that the fundamental presupposition of all of the divine truth is found in Abram the patriarch. Because the fundamental presupposition by which he operated was a conviction that the Word of God is the ultimate reality, and that life is lived by trust in the Word of God. In fact, Abram is the first defender of the Christian worldview, and he is the concrete illustration of what it is to be a Christian.

What I'd like to do today in our time in the ministry of the Word is to speak rather briefly about the text, about Abram's journey to Canaan, his journey through Canaan, just make a few points, and then spend the most of our time on the essence of the faith of Abram. For Abram's faith is the faith of a Christian. Now by Christian I mean the faith of a believer, a true believer in the God of Holy Scripture.

Now some commentators have suggested that Abram, when he was called from Ur of the Chaldees and left the south country and came to the north, and then resided in Haran for a while, and did not move from there until Tira died, that Abram therefore was guilty of a kind of incomplete obedience. That is, he was called by God to leave his country, which he did, he was called to leave his relatives, which he did, and he was called to leave his father's house, which he did not. And so it was not until Tira died that he came into the land.

There may be something to that, I only say this, the Bible does not make any point over that. And so we will not lay any stress upon it. At any rate we read in the fourth verse, So Abram went forth as the Lord had

spoken him, and Lot went with him.

Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran, and he came to the land of Canaan. Why did Abram leave? To start with, well we read in the fourth verse, So Abram went forth as the Lord had spoken to him. The cause of his journey was ultimately the word of God.

He had the conviction that when God spoke he was to be obeyed. And so in faith he responded, and in this sense he is the illustration of what it is to live by the Christian worldview that the scriptures contain the revelation of God, and as such give us absolute truth. Now he took some companions with him.

He took his wife, who was barren. He took his nephew, whose father had died, Lot. And furthermore Abram was the head of a large clan.

In the next chapter or so we will read that there were over three hundred people attached to Abram, and so he was a rather wealthy man who had a large retinue of followers, members of his family, and those who were working for him, servants and others. He was rich. Rich even though he hadn't attended our financial seminar.

Somehow or another he had learned the basic principles. And the striking thing about this to me is that everything that Abram had was committed to this venture of faith. All of them left and came into the land of Canaan.

There's one thing about Abram you have to say, and that is that he did not care what other people thought. I'm sure he got a lot of advice. We'll talk about that later.

But it made no difference to Abram. He was interested, it seems, in following the word of God. So he left and came into the land.

Now in the next section in verses six through nine we read of his journey through Canaan, and there are three phases in the text as you'll notice. The first phase represents his passage through the land to Shechem. The sixth verse reads, And Abram passed through the land, as far as the site of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh.

Now the Canaanite was then in the land. Shechem must have been a place where there was an ancient landmark and there he stopped. There was an impediment for Abram and it was the fact that the Canaanite was in the land.

That must have been discouraging, and I'm sure that there must have been many objections raised. Abram, you're going into this land which you say the Lord is going to give you and your seed, but this land is inhabited by the Canaanites. What are you going to do about that? I don't imagine Abram had a very good answer.

He probably said, I don't know, but I know this, that God has called me to go this direction. I don't know where I'm ultimately going to wind up, but he's called us to go into the land of Canaan and to the land of Canaan we are going. I would only remind you of this, he might have said, that we serve the Lord God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth.

Later on in the fourteenth chapter he calls upon this Lord God High, Lord God Possessor of heaven and earth, and so it's clear that for him to have the Lord God on his side is sufficient to handle the impediment

of the Canaanite in the land. Well when he comes now to the Oak of Moreh, we read that the Lord appeared to Abram and said to your seed or descendants, I will give this land. This incidentally is the first specific mention of a theophany in the book of Genesis, although it is not the first theophany in history, because in Acts chapter seven we read that the God of glory had already appeared to Abram when he was in Ur of the Chaldees and called him out.

And further Adam and Eve had had fellowship in the Garden of Eden with the Lord God and that evidently too was a theophany. So several theophanies had taken place, but this is the first specific mention of a theophany in the book of Genesis. God appears to Abram.

It's almost as if he welcomed him into the land and reminded him that he was going to give him that land. To your descendants I will give this land. Now that's a striking promise because remember that Abram was a middle-aged man.

He lived to be one hundred and seventy-five years of age and he's already seventy-five years of age and so far as Abram and Sarah were concerned, while perhaps at this point they did not know the true medical analysis of the situation, so far as they were concerned they could not have children. Sarah was barren. He's seventy-five years old, a middle-aged man.

Thirty-five is middle-aged now, you know, biblically. So here is a man who is a middle-aged man. His wife is barren.

He cannot have children and yet the Lord God promises the land to his seed. And so in that promise, this gracious promise that was given to him, there was not only encouragement but a trial of his faith. And I'm sure they must have discussed that often.

But God gave the promise and we read so he built an altar there to the Lord that had appeared to him. This incidentally is the first mention of an altar to the worship of Yahweh in the book of Genesis. So the worship of the great I am who I am is first referred to here.

So he built an altar to Yahweh, the Lord God, who had appeared to him. The second phase is described in verse eight, whether he moved from Shechem or whether he moved from the Oak of, the Oak of Moreh on down in the land because of the hostility of his neighbors or because of the approaching famine, the Bible does not say. But he moved on and eventually came, according to the eighth verse, east of Bethel and west, east of Bethel, Bethel on the west and Ai on the east.

And there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord. And then the third phase is described in the ninth verse, he journeyed on continuing toward the south. Now let's stop for a moment and ask ourselves the question, what is the essence of the faith of Abram? What's the secret of his life? And here we now come to the place, as Dr. Vernon McGee would say, the place where the rubber meets the road.

What is the secret of Abram's life? Now I'd like to suggest to you that there is a basic principle in Abram's life and there are three traits or marks of his life. And at the same time there is a problem that he must deal with continually. Let me speak first about the basic principle of the life of Abram.

Now we are taught in Scripture, without faith it is impossible to please God. Without faith it is impossible to please God. Now isn't it interesting that in the Bible, even though we read without faith it is impossible to please God, we read also, they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

They that are in the flesh cannot exercise faith. Now the Lord Jesus expresses this in another way. He says, no man can come to me except, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.

So what I'm going to say about Abram and his faith, well that's the dominating principle of his life, is said with the full understanding of you in the audience and of me. We're not talking about things from the divine standpoint, but we're talking about Abram's life from the human standpoint. The fundamental principle of Abram's life from the human standpoint is his faith.

By faith Abram went out not knowing whether he was going. He obeyed. The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews says, by faith called to receive this lamb, he obeyed and went out not knowing where he was going.

The fundamental principle of life that Abraham was dominated by is the principle of faith. The life that pleases God is the life of faith. Compliance with the revealed will of God.

From the human side, from the divine side, it is God who gives faith. For by grace are you saved through faith, and that, that is this, by grace through faith salvation. That not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.

The grace, the salvation, the faith, the whole thing is a gift of God. Not of works lest any man should boast. It is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on his name, but to suffer for his sake.

It is given to believe in his name. The thing that turned Augustine around, he said, was the recognition of the scripture in 1 Corinthians chapter 4 and verse 7, where he learned, what have you that you have not received from the Lord God? Do you have faith? Has God put faith in your heart? You have received it from the Lord God. Have you been saved? You have received it from the Lord God.

Do you have the forgiveness of sins? You have received it from the Lord God. Do you have sonship? You have received it from the Lord God. Do you have faith, the faith that saves? You have received it from the Lord God.

It transformed Augustine, and it was the hinge on which he debated the Pelagians. So, Abram's life was the life of faith given by God, and the 75 year old man ventured everything that he possessed, his family, his accumulations of wealth, all of his friends, on the seemingly impossible dream that God was actually going to give him a childless father, the land, and also to his seed. It's remarkable.

One of the commentators has said, the important thing is that Abram's faith yielded obedience. Or as William Perkins, the English reformer, to whom we've referred several times recently, his faith was obediential. That's his word.

Obediential. That is, the faith that Abram possessed was a faith that obeyed. This has been the belief of the Christian Church down through the years.

That the faith that saves is a faith that works. We are saved by faith, but it is a faith that works. *Sola fides justificat sed non fides qua est sola.*

Faith alone justifies, but not the faith which is alone. So, Abram's faith was believing faith. I love some of the things that Martin Luther says.

He had a most vivid way of expressing truth, and he has some interesting words about the faith of Abram. These are his words. He says, faith is a lively and powerful thing.

It's not merely a drowsy and idle thought, nor does it float somewhere upon the heart as a duck upon the water, but it's like water warmed through and through by a good warm fire. Living faith. If Luther, for example, had only come to realize that this understanding of faith, living faith, is the faith of the Word of God, he might not have said concerning that passage in James, which he never really fully understood, that the epistle of James was a right stroy epistle.

He thought that James had probably said some things that were out of harmony with Paul's justification by faith alone. But here he expresses exactly what Paul and James were talking about. The faith that saves is a faith that truly works.

It's living, vital, powerful. And Abram's faith was the kind of faith which led him to act upon the promises of God. That's the basic principle of his life.

Now, I know Abram was a man like the rest of us, and we shall see that he failed. There's no hesitation in the activities of Abram, though there are misunderstandings. In the case of our Lord, there was no hesitation and no misinterpretation either.

But I know that in Abram's heart, some debates went along all the time. When God spoke, I can just imagine Abram saying, it's so unwise to trust God in a matter so big as this. Do you mean, Lord, that I have to go into the land and take everything that I've got? Can I not at least leave sufficient funds in the Heron Savings and Loan Association so that if I do fail, if I have misunderstood your directions, I at least may have enough to keep body and soul together.

After all, I have 300 people that depend upon me. I can just imagine that kind of debate going on within his heart. All of this, of course, implies that God's not very wise.

That he doesn't really provide for those whom he gives directions, to whom he gives directions. If we say, Lord, it's unwise to trust thee in this matter, it's as if to say, you are not wise in giving me such a direction. So there are no concessions to be made.

We must deliberately rest ourselves upon the character of God, and that is what Abram did. Now another thing that might have troubled him was, if only God would come down and explain everything to me, I'd have faith in him. But we are, we're not really trusting the Lord when we demand explanations for everything.

As a matter of fact, everything that we can explain, we can command. And so if we demand an explanation, then, of course, we are not really dependent upon him at all, but we are taking the autonomous place ourselves. In the spiritual domain, nothing is explained until we obey.

But the moment we obey, the explanation comes and we prove the will of God through the activities of faith. Then we understand. Many missionaries followed the direction of the law of God and went to the foreign field.

I can remember Judson particularly. Judson felt that God had directed him to the foreign field. Now I'm not positive of these details because it's been a good while since I read his biography, but my impression is that he was first directed to go to India, so he thought.

But when he got there, he couldn't get in. The only thing he could do was to go into Burma, and it was there that God blessed him and made him one of the great missionaries of his day. It was God's intention

all along.

That was his decreative will. Judson thought otherwise, but he had obeyed, and he discovered by his obedience what the will of God was for him. Now if I know Abram, there also were other debates that went on in his heart.

I can also imagine him saying, if God would only give me a few supernatural touches, then I will trust him. I'll throw out a few fleeces, and if God will do for me as he did for Gideon, then I can trust him. But if we do that, then soon we are idolizing ourselves.

I don't mind being a saint if I can remain natural and be a saint entirely on my own initiative, one might say. If I can extort God about the ways in which he should deal with me, then I won't mind following him. But of course, the difficulty is we do not want to allow God to be sovereign in his activities with us.

So Abram, the fundamental principle of his life is the principle of trust in God. I'd like to suggest to you that Abram's life, as he lived out this fundamental principle of faith, and in this he becomes the prototype of the man who has the right Weltanschauung, or worldview, the Christian worldview. I'd like to suggest to you that there are some marks that characterize the man who is living according to this fundamental principle.

Now of course there are probably other marks, and we shall see them as we go along in Abram's life, but I'm going to single out three here, which I think are important. He had been comfortably ensconced in the oar of the Chaldees when God had spoken to him, but now he has become the first of the great band of believers who confess that they are strangers and pilgrims upon the earth. And as you look at his life, these three things stand out.

First of all, the promises of God. Notice the fourth verse, So Abram went forth as the Lord had spoken to him. Notice the seventh verse, The Lord appeared to Abram and said to your descendants, I will give this land.

Now Abram believed those things. In the New Testament much is made of this. When you turn over to the epistle of the Hebrews, you will see that this author thought that the promises of God were rather significant in Abram's life.

Let me just read a few of the verses. Verse 9 of Hebrews chapter 11, By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise. Verse 11, By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered him faithful who had promised.

Verse 13, All these died in faith without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims or exiles on the earth. Verse 17, By faith Abraham when he was tested offered up Isaac and he who had received the promises. That's the way he's described, the promise receiver.

Abram was offering up his only begotten son. So the promise of God, that is fundamental in the life of Abram. The mark of the Christian life is first and fundamentally faith and as the object of faith the promises of the word of God.

Therefore you can see that right at the heart of the Christian faith is the Bible. For it is in the Bible that we have the promises of God. It is impossible for a man to live the Christian faith without a deep acquaintance

with the Bible.

In winter found the promises of God. Abram was confident that the God who promises is a God who calls the things that be not as though they were. He is a man who believes that God is the God of the resurrection and therefore if he says that we are to do something we are to do it.

Because he is confident that he will fulfill his promise in our lives. There's a famous French proverb at night all cats are gray. Which the author of Les Trois Mousquetaires, if you've read that when you were taking your French.

It's used as the chapter title of one of the chapters of that book. The idea behind the expression at night all cats are gray is that things must be looked at in their proper light. If they are to be seen in their proper hue.

If we look at things out of darkness things look the same. Now I think that everybody else was looking at things like this French proverb. At night all cats are gray.

But Abram was enabled by God because he was relying upon the promises of God. He was able to see things as they really are. He was able to look at the cat in the daytime.

That is he looked at the cats in the light of the truth of God. And consequently he saw the God of the resurrection where other people saw foolishness to follow these promises that this Yahweh is supposed to have given. Now that is the first characteristic of Abram's life.

He was a man of the promises. Incidentally that is why in Believers Chapel we have consistently through the years tried to stress the significance and importance of the word of God. Now we will never give that up so far as I know.

The elders are committed to that and I'm certainly committed to that and we will continue to do just that to proclaim the promises of God. The second thing that characterized Abram's life was the altar. Now Dr. Taylor was here for the first service this morning and he said as I went out with him he said ah I knew it all the time Abraham was an Anglican.

He built an altar. Well take it the way you like. He did build the altar and that's important.

Notice the seventh verse. To your descendants I will give this land so he built an altar. Now we will see that this is prominent in the life of these early men.

What does the altar suggest? Well of course it suggests incidentally we only try to give the outlines of this because we don't have time to fill in the details but all of the doctrines of soteriology could be crammed into this so he built an altar to the Lord. The altar spoke of sin because it spoke of the necessity of the death of the substitute and consequently it spoke of the doctrine that the wages of sin is death. And so it spoke of sin.

It spoke also of sacrifice because the animal must be placed upon the altar and slain. It's suggested in the Old Testament long before the fullness came to be known that without shedding of the blood of sacrifice there is no remission of sin. But it also suggested a particular type of doctrine of the atonement.

It suggested a penal substitution. That is the animal died under penalty. The animal must die under the judgment of the priest who slew the animal.

And the priest standing for God this suggests God's judgment upon life. But it also suggested since the individual who offered it went free a penal penalty, penal substitution. That is the animal was slain and the individual who brought the offering escapes the judgment.

So the altar suggested penal substitutionary sacrifice. And of course as a result of the fact that God accepts the penal substitutionary sacrifice it suggests access and worship. So it's not surprising that in the next verse when Abram builds an altar again he calls upon the name of the Lord.

As Peter put it in his epistle, For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, that he might introduce us to God. Now that's my translation but that is the meaning of that text. That he might introduce us to God.

Access by virtue of the slain sacrifice. H.C. Leupold who's written a very good commentary on the book of Genesis a Lutheran man has said the soul of the patriarchal religion was sacrifice. Luther believed that the call on the name of the Lord was really to preach, proclaim the name of the Lord.

Well whether Luther is right or not we can say this, that when those men built their altars and offered their sacrifices they did preach to their neighbors that the God that they worshiped was a God who was approached through blood sacrifice. So the altar, that's the second thing that characterizes the life of faith. May I ask you a question? Is your life characterized by reliance on the promises of God? Is your life characterized by an acknowledgement of the altar? When you get down upon your knees in the presence of the Lord, do you plead your access on the, by virtue of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you recognize all that is meant when we say Christ died for our sins? It's on the basis of this that we have access and are able to praise and worship him.

We should never forget that. And the third thing, and this is the thing in which Abram's pilgrim character manifests itself. We read in the eighth verse, then he proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east.

The writer of the epistle of the Hebrews makes a great deal over this. He says that they dwelt in tents. So the tent is characteristic.

Did you know it's often said of Abraham and the patriarchs that they built altars to the Lord. It's never said, so far as I can remember, that they built houses for themselves. Now don't go out and sell your house, but I think that's an emphasis of the word of God.

You don't read that Abram came to Shechem and there constructed a house, or he went to the oak of Moriah or to Bethel and built himself a home. You read about altars, but the idea of a certain dwelling place in one particular locality was something that Abram never really knew throughout his life. He was a pilgrim, strange on a sojourner upon the earth.

Now, why did Abram build a tent and not a house? Well, the Bible gives us some indications of why he did this. Again, the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews says that he lived as an alien in the land of promise as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise, for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. Abram recognized that his ultimate dwelling place was not the land as it was constructed in his day.

He recognized that to fulfill the promises that God had given to him demanded a little bit more than the Canaan to which he came. And so his eyes were not set upon Canaan, but his eyes were looking far

beyond Canaan to that city that had foundations, whose builder and maker was God. Now, he was not forced to do this.

In fact, the scriptures say that if he had wanted to, Hebrews 11 again, if he had wanted to, he had opportunity to go back to Haran. But he stayed because he believed the word of God and felt God had called him there. So Abram, to put it this way, was among the Canaanites, but not of the Canaanites.

We read in the New Testament that we are in the world, but not of the world. Thus Abram beautifully illustrates again the life of the Christian. He didn't attend their tribal functions.

He didn't intermarry with them, or at least he was against intermarriage. He did not take discounts from them either. He didn't, when he bought something, say, now I want to remind you that I'm Abram the patriarch and I ought to get a ministerial discount.

There are many preachers who do that, you know. They look for ministerial discounts. Abram didn't do that.

As a matter of fact, when he was offered the things that he had won in battle by the king of Sodom, who said to him, give the people to me and take the goods for yourself. Abram said, I've sworn to the Lord God most high possessor of heaven and earth that I will not take a thread or a sandal, thong, or anything that is yours lest you should say I have made Abram rich. He wanted the glory to go to God.

So he was a man of the tent. Now Abram had problems just like you and I did. The Canaanite was in the land, but his faith was not daunted by the, well, the British almost ruined my pronunciation.

When I was over there, I heard one of the announcers on the BBC speaking about the difficulty. Well, after a while I figured out he was trying to say difficulty. And my, my, I was thrown into confusion until finally I heard someone else on the BBC, see, saying difficulty.

And so I went back to my pronunciation. It's difficult to say difficulty. Now his faith was not daunted by difficulties.

It was just tested by them. Well, our time is up. Let me just say this in conclusion.

The distinguishing Christian life principle of the English reformers was not intellectual exercises. You know, people often say about Believer's Chapel, and I presume there's a measure of truth in it for some, they like to say, well, out at Believer's Chapel, you're going to get a great deal of theology. Always consider that good.

They're getting the major point. But sometimes, no doubt, we do make it a little too difficult for the babes. But I want to say this, that we have never proclaimed, and we never intend for anyone to gain the impression that the Christian life is a matter of intellectual exercises.

That is, if you can learn the theology that we proclaim, then you automatically become an outstanding Christian. The Christian life is not the life of the professional theologian or of the scholastic theologian, and the English reformers made very much of that. They said that life was not a matter of intellectual exercises.

Now they had mountains of books in the days of the English reformers. They had so many books on theology and things about theology written that William Tyndall complained that such was the mountain of

books produced by the theologians that even allowing only one book for each author, no warehouse in London could contain them all. So they knew that life was not simply intellectual exercises, nor was it the common view of the time of the English reformers that one lived the Christian life by conformity to the rites and ceremonies of the established church.

Tyndall adds, I've known as holy men as might be, as the world counteth holiness, which at the hour of death had no trust in God at all, but cried, cast holy water, light the holy candle, and so forth, sore lamenting that they must die. The rites and ceremonies of the church are insufficient to save the soul, and the individual who hopes and trusts only in the rites and ceremonies of the church shall discover in the final analysis, when it counts most, they have nothing upon which they may lean. So if you're trusting in baptism, sitting at the Lord's table, attending church, praying through all of the exercises of religion, you shall be disappointed.

The Christian life is not bound up in conformity to the rites and ceremonies of any church. And those English reformers insisted, finally, that the subjectivism of the mystics was something that must be avoided too. It's interesting that the mystics insisted that scholastic theology was wrong because it subjected the word of God to the reason of the scholastics, little realizing that they themselves who appeal to experience as the test and God of the Christian life were also subjecting the word of God to reason, their reason, as it was bound up in experience.

Now the reformers knew that the Christian life could not be grounded upon experience. We have so much of that in evangelicalism today. Anything that makes us feel good, anything that makes us have a happy time, this is good.

We get together and exhort one another and have a good happy time, that's great. But the truth that lies back of our times together, that's something different. The reformers insisted it's fine to have experience, but experience is to be judged and tested always by the word of God.

Conformity to the scripture is the test of the Christian life. Now the Christian life as set forth in scripture involves not simply the intellect but also the activity in life of the truth that is received into the mind. So the Christian life is to be judged and governed solely by the word of God.

Luther pointed out that we do not pay sufficient attention to the fact that in our whole life the word is the measure, the standard, and the most precious thing that guides our life so that you can say, I am doing this in the word of God. The Lord has commanded this, this pleases God. But if the word is lacking, then he who, then he who can should flee even if his life gives the appearance of being angelic.

It's great truth in that. There are people who say, ah we must follow him, he's such a lovely character. But fundamental is, is there conformity to the word of God.

John Frith, prisoner in the Tower of London in 1533 at a time when if he had compromised his belief just a little bit, he'd been just a little wise, he would have saved his life. Replied to Sir Thomas More, I assure you I neither will nor can cease to speak for the word of God borneth in my body like a fervent fire and will needs have issues. I like that.

And Mr Frith has been rejoicing in the presence of the Lord as a testimony to the sufficiency of the word of God ever since. Hugh Latimer in his last confinement at Oxford read through his New Testament seven times more as he prepared to give his life for the Lord Jesus Christ. So what is the lesson of Abraham, the

first great pilgrim father? Well, it's a lesson for self-indulgent, pleasure-seeking, careless evangelicalism.

Learn from Abraham's resolute resting on the promises of God as he, fellow pilgrim with us, made his way to the celestial city. May God help us to follow in his train. If you're here this morning and you have never believed in the Lord Jesus, we remind you that the Christian life is not yours, that only comes through faith in Jesus Christ who offered himself an atoning sacrifice on Calvary's cross.

May God the Holy Spirit work in your heart and give you the faith to see yourself as you truly are and to see Christ in the light of what he's done and may you flee to him for forgiveness of sins. May God speak to your heart to that end. Let's stand for the benediction.

Again, father, we are so grateful to thee for these wonderful lines from the word of God as we continue to study the life of this great man of faith whom thou didst sustain. May the lessons be lessons that by thy grace we're enabled to appropriate and live the life that pleases thee in our generation and time. May grace, mercy, and peace go with us for Jesus' sake.

Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/12/SID12950.mp3>

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