

(Genesis) 25 - the Dance of Circumstances and the Danger of Compromise

by S. Lewis Johnson

The sermon explores the challenges of life's circumstances and the danger of compromise, using Abram's experience in Genesis 12:10-20 as a case study.

Duration: 49:07

Scripture: Genesis 12:10

Topics: "Compromise"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the entangling web of sin and how one sin leads to another. He emphasizes the destruction of a believer's testimony and the chastisement of God, but also highlights the lesson of God's mercy towards His people. The sermon focuses on the dance of circumstances and the danger of compromise, emphasizing that while we cannot control our physical circumstances, our response to them determines the environment in which we live. The preacher uses the example of Abram in Genesis chapter 12 to illustrate these lessons, highlighting Abram's decline in faith and his deviation to worldly schemes when faced with a famine in the land.

Transcript

The scripture reading for today is in the twelfth chapter of the book of Genesis, and I would like for you, if you have your Bibles, to turn with me to that chapter, and will you listen as I read verses ten through twenty. Let me, for the sake of the message that follows, as well as the reading of the scripture, remind you of the context. Abram has been called from Ur of the Chaldees.

He had hesitated for a while in Haran, and then ultimately had come into the land. God had given him a series of great promises. Promises that he would give him a land, that he would show him, that he would be made a great nation, that he would be blessed, and that he was to be a blessing himself, that his name would be great, and that he would bless those who blessed Abram, and he would curse those who cursed Abram.

And the climactic promise was that in all the families of... that in Abram all the families of the earth should be blessed. And then Abram had left and had entered the land, and we are now at that part of the story of Abram at which he has come into the land. He has received additional promises concerning the land.

He has constructed an altar, and he has been moving over the land in his tent. And so we read in verse 10, Now there was a famine in the land, so Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. And it came about when he came near to Egypt that he said to Sarah his wife, See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman, and it will come about when the Egyptians see you that they will say, This is his wife, and they will kill me, but they will let you live.

Please say that you are my sister, so that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may live on account of you. And it came about when Abram came into Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. Incidentally, commentators have discussed this almost universally.

After all, Sarah was 65 years of age, and the commentators find it very difficult for a 65-year-old woman to be considered to be very beautiful. I've never had any difficulty with that myself, but they have. I might say this, that of course the length of span of Sarah's life was considerably longer than our span of life, and it may well have been that though she was 65 years of age, she looked as if she were about 35.

But at any rate, the Bible says she was very beautiful. And verse 15, And Pharaoh's officials saw her and praised her to Pharaoh, and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house, which I assume in the light of the customs of the time meant that she was taken into what we would call his harem. Now that would not mean that she was immediately to become his wife, but rather she was there and would ultimately become his wife, for the custom was for some length of time to take...to ensue before she would become his wife in a physical sense.

Verse 16, Therefore he treated Abram well for her sake, and gave him sheep and oxen and donkeys and male and female servants and female donkeys and camels. I'd like for you particularly to notice that Abram was given female servants, because a comment in the message that follows will bear on that point. Then verse 17 follows, But the Lord struck Pharaoh in his house with great plagues because of Sarah, Abram's wife.

Then Pharaoh called Abram and said, What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say she is my sister, so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife, take her and go. And Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him, and they escorted him away with his wife and all that belonged to him. May the Lord add his blessing to this reading of his word.

The subject for this morning in the exposition of the word of God is the dance of circumstances and the danger of compromise. There are some very crucial lessons that pertain to the Christian life that come before us in the segment of Abram's life found in Genesis chapter 12, verse 10 through verse 20. There is the problem and challenge of the circumstances of life in which God places us, in which we find ourselves.

There is the frailty of the elect of God. We are not to think of those that are elect and saved and growing in Christian knowledge and faith as being strong from the moment of their conversion. We see in this great man of faith, the exemplar of faith, so many of the frailties that characterize us after we've been down the road for a considerable period of time.

There is the illustration of the entangling web of sin, how one sin leads to another, and another becomes much easier after the second has been committed. We see the destruction of a believer's testimony and the chastisement of God, not the judgment or condemnation of God, but the chastisement of God that often is the experience of the believer. But I think overriding all of this is the lesson of the mercy of God toward his own people.

The title that I've suggested for the message is one that focuses attention on the human side of things, the dance of circumstances, and the danger of compromise. But this overriding theme that emerges in this section is the theme of sovereign mercy. Abram doesn't appear to very good advantage in this little account.

It's another indication, incidentally, of the Bible's unimpeachable honesty in the presentation of its story. It tells the truth about the men and women who are its primary characters. In the language of today, it tells it as it is.

Abraham's surrender to expediency and compromise makes us almost blush for this great man of God. But we're made of the same stuff. The Bible says, the apostle Paul who probably was the greatest psychologist in the word of God, in the sense that he understood the things that are within us, probably more than any other one except our Lord, said of each one of us who are believers, I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, there dwelleth no good thing.

May we be delivered from trimming our sails as Abram did, because we have come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The challenge and appeal of the account, if I were to put it in a line or two, would be to live according to the vision that has been granted us. Abram had been called by God in efficacious grace.

He had been given some great promises, promises that pertain to the land, to the people about him, to himself. And he had been told that in him there would follow universal blessing. One could not ask for greater promises than had come to Abram.

And yet his life, as you read the story of it in these chapters in Genesis, is the constant appeal to live according to the promises that had been made to him. In other words, to live according to the vision that God had given him. Now, I think that Abram's call and his promises and his destiny are illustrative of the call that has come to us, and the promises that have been made to us, and the destiny that has been set forth before us.

And so the question that faces us constantly, and which God himself poses is, will you live according to the challenge of the divine dealings with you? That's the lesson that flows from this account of Abram and his experience in Egypt. Let's look first at the challenge of circumstances, and let me call your attention to something that Oswald Chambers wrote many years ago. He said there is a difference between circumstances and environment.

We cannot control our circumstances, but we are the deciders of our own environment. Environment is the element in our circumstances which fits the disposition, that is, our disposition. A man convicted of sin and a man in love may be in the same external circumstances, but the environment of the one is totally different from that of the other.

Our environment depends upon our personal reaction to the circumstances. Circumstances over which we have no control is perfectly true, but it must never be made to mean that we cannot control ourselves in those circumstances. What Mr. Chambers is trying to say is simply this, that we cannot really control the physical circumstances of our lives.

Ultimately we will be in circumstances over which we do not have control. But what he is also saying is that it makes all the difference in the world how we respond to the circumstances that come to us, and our response determines the environment in which we live. Now if we bear that in mind, I think we will

understand some of the things that happened to Abram.

After all, he could not determine his circumstances and the famine came. But a great deal ultimately depended upon how he responded to the circumstances. And in that sense, he was responsible for his environment.

Now, we read in verse 10, Now there was a famine in the land. A famine? He's just been given the great promises? He's just entered the land? He's just had another theophany and God has confirmed the promises? To your seed I will give this land? And we read, there was a famine in the land. A famine? Yes, a famine.

Now famines were very serious things, and this one is called a severe famine. In the book of Genesis there are two other severe famines, so it was not an uncommon thing. But a famine, after these great promises, a famine in the promised land.

Yes, a famine in the promised land. And a famine just as he entered the land, which God had promised to him. Yes, a famine.

A famine in the promised land. A famine in the promised land just as he has entered the land. And it was no trivial matter.

It occurs just after obedience and the theophany. You might have expected that Aaron would, that Abram would have thought, well, I have obeyed God and now at least for a little while things are going to be nice and rosy. But after obedience there comes a famine.

Has God deceived me? Abram might have said, have I really heard the promises that I have heard? Do they really mean anything? Why? Well, of course we know why now. We know it was a test. And the purpose of this test was to lead Abram to a further abandonment to the Lord.

He has finally given up everything. He's risked everything in this great venture of faith to enter the land of Canaan. But it's obvious that his faith has not yet reached maturity.

And so as he reaches the land for the test, faces this great exemplar of the faith. Now it would be nice if we were given some insight into the thoughts that went on in Abram's mind. That would have helped us a great deal and no doubt would have been very interesting to us.

After all, the path of a separated man, such as Abram, is never an easy path. And consequently, it would be nice to know what actually was transpiring in his mind. If I can be permitted to take a guess at some of the things that may have gone on in Abram's mind, it might have been something like this.

I have been obedient to the Lord, and consequently, I find myself not being blessed by God, but rather suffering harm. I can just imagine an injured tone that might have come into Abram's language. As he looked back on the past and then looked at the present, he might have said, well, you know, when I was in Ur of the Chaldees, there were no famines down there.

And when I went up to Haran, there were no famines there. But I come into the land having obeyed the Lord, and now we have famine. So I guess it's probably better not to have entered that wicked gate after all, and to make my path down the narrow way which leads to the celestial city.

How typical that is. Every Christian that I know of has at some time or another been heard to say, after all, when I became a Christian, things really began to happen. The bad things.

And many is the Christian, or the Christians who have reasoned that perhaps it was better before I became a Christian. Now the Bible says about Abram that he had opportunity to go back, but he did not go back. So we have to give him credit for that.

But I can just imagine him going over the things that were happening to him now and comparing them with his former life. There is the businessman, and he finds that he's been very disappointed in some very promising investments, and he can trace the downturn in his investments to the time when he received Jesus Christ as his Savior. And this is not an uncommon experience at all.

So you can just imagine Abram as he looked back over his life beforehand and reasoned that perhaps he'd made a wrong decision after all. Now let me suggest to you that in the example, we do not have any indication that God has pledged to give us an unbroken run of prosperity, to use F. B. Meyer's expression, once we come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Wouldn't it be a terrible thing for the Christian church if God had promised us an unbroken run of prosperity after we received Christ as our Savior? Why, our halls and auditoriums would be packed and jammed with counterfeit Christians who were looking for a fast buck.

And as a matter of fact, that is the appeal that many make. Many tell us that if you become a Christian and give ten percent of your income to the Lord's work, He will bless you financially and you will not have any of the trials and temptations that you're having now. In fact, over the radio, that is one of the chief appeals of the radio preachers of today.

God never intended His believers to be poor, unhappy. He intended them to be prosperous. Why are you driving around in that 1962? I started to say a word that would have marked my age, but it's still a pretty good word.

Fliver. You should be driving in Cadillacs and Continentals. God wants His servants to be prosperous and He expects them to be prosperous.

And you will be prosperous. Send ten dollars by return mail. And it's true, they are prosperous.

They are driving in the Cadillacs and the Continentals, but you don't see them. And you're still driving around in your ramshackle, I won't name a model, but anyway, in your ramshackle car. Well, listen, this place would be filled with counterfeit Christians if God promised material blessing when we believed in Jesus Christ.

He does not promise that. He promises that He will be with us. He promises us that He will take us through the experiences of life.

And He, in the experiences that we have, seeks to disentangle us from all of the things that would prevent us from abandoning ourselves to Him. So Abram is experiencing the famine for the simple reason that God would test him in order that he may be disentangled from the material things of life. And the famine came.

Now Abram responds by going down to Egypt. Isn't it, isn't it interesting and isn't it good that Christian discipline forces us to become like little children? Now the Bible says that we ought to be like little children,

but it's Christian discipline that forces us to become like little children so we trust our Heavenly Father instead of all of the schemes that the arm of the flesh devises. Egypt, the land of the Pyramids, the Sphinx, often stands in the Bible for an alliance with the world and dependence on the arm of the flesh.

Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help and who look not to the Lord God of Israel and trust in His name, Isaiah tells us. In fact, some Bible teachers even suggest that when we read in verse 10, Abram went down to Egypt, that's a hint that to leave the land and to go to Egypt is to go down and thus to make a mistake. And when Abram finally is disentangled from the things that were in Egypt, we read in chapter 13 and verse 1, so Abram went up from the land to the Negev.

And there he is resuming his life with God. Now I want to say this, that if you will look at the Bible you will find that going down to Egypt is not necessarily a sin. It is not necessarily an alliance with the world.

And the proof of this is that we read in Matthew chapter 2 that Joseph, at the behest of God, took the Lord Jesus down into Egypt. The truth of the matter is the Bible speaks of going down into Egypt and coming up out of Egypt because that's the only way topographically that you can get to Egypt. You have to go down.

And when you come out of Egypt into the land you have to go up. But having said that, to keep you from making out of the Bible more than is made out of this, let me hasten to say that it is clear that when Abram went down to Egypt, he went down without consulting the Lord and thus the beginning of this experience was wrong and the end of it is disgraceful because he was paralyzed by fear and failure to trust in the Lord. Our fatal mistake, F. B. Meyer has said, and how fatal it is to fail in the midst of panic to put our trust in the Lord God.

How often this happens in life. Young people getting ready, thinking about marriage, and suddenly across the path of the young lady or the young man there comes someone very attractive to the flesh but no Christian faith. And there may be difficulties from which this allowance, this union might enable, from which this allowance might enable them to escape.

And so they become involved with those who are actually, according to Scripture, enemies of the truth of God. And then must suffer the consequences of entrance into a marriage bond contrary to Scripture. There are businessmen whose businesses need an infusion of capital and in order to have the infusion of capital it is necessary to make an allowance with the world.

And a new partner, someone not dominated by the principles of the Word of God, is brought into the business. And ultimately there is the embarrassment and difficulty associated with an allowance, a union with that which is contrary to the Word of God. So Abram, failing to recognize that Jehovah is Jehovah Jireh, our Lord who provides or Jehovah who provides, goes down into Egypt.

Now you could explain all of this naturally. You wouldn't have to appeal to spiritual principles. You could just say, well, the trouble with Abram was that his bowel rhythms were wrong.

That is, he failed to take into account the cycle of physical stamina and endurance or the cycle of emotional sensitivity or that third one of thirty-three days, the intellectual. Those who make great claims for bowel rhythms tell us that if we can recognize the cycles of our lives then we can know the highs and the lows, the critical periods, and really we can live in a way in which everything will be wonderful if we just know these three cycles. But now, of course, that may appear to some to be the answer to the problems of

life, but it is surely not.

Abram's problem was not that he had forgotten his bowels rhythms. It was simply that he had not recognized the promises of God in the light of the circumstances that faced him. We look next at the weakness of Abram.

I've noticed this, by the way, about believers. Have you? That when a person first believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, there is frequently a kind of fanaticism that he possesses. It's evident at that time.

One of the first things that we like to do is to tell our family about the things that have happened to us. And so the first thing that we do is to get hold of our father or our mother or our sisters or our brother--I'm speaking out of personal experience--and inform them of the gospel of Christ. We seem very arrogant then.

We seem very proud. They do not understand, of course, that we're not making any claims for ourselves. We say that we have been converted.

We say that we have become Christians. They do not understand. They are abiding in the darkness that the Apostle Paul speaks about, the darkness of the natural man.

And the result is that by our fanaticism and our failure to recognize the necessity for dealing patiently, they are offended by our fanaticism. And we frequently lose them, sometimes for years. But then have you noticed this? As Christians grow in grace and grow in sanctification, there comes a true attractiveness to them.

And others notice it. And the attractiveness is very pleasing to the Christian. And consequently his test is not fanaticism, or to express the word.

But the test that comes to him is to express the word in the midst of the attractiveness that others may see in the individual. In other words, what often happens is that a Christian who has been praised because of the kind of attractiveness that the Lord has given to them, has then the tendency not to be fanatical in the bold presentation of the word, but to trim his sails. To exercise subterfuge.

To trace the secret of life to something other than the blood and cross of Jesus Christ. Now that's something to think about. Something for us to think about.

And it seems to me that perhaps this is something that Abram faces now. Here he's going down to Egypt, and so subterfuge and cover-up and expediency characterize this Christian who's now made some advances in spiritual things. Well, as they drew near to the land of Egypt, he had his little scheme already thought up.

He said, now Sarah, see now I know that you are a beautiful woman. You see one sin, the sin of going down to Egypt, not relying upon the promises of God, not taking this matter to the Lord, leads to the second sin. Incidentally, the expression about Sarah that she was a beautiful woman is translated in some of the versions that she was a woman who was fair in appearance.

Lying back of that is the fact that the skin of the Egyptians was generally darker. And history says that they had a high regard for those whose skin was a little lighter. So that perhaps even then, gentlemen preferred blondes.

But at any rate, when Sarah came into the land, Abram knew that she was going to be regarded as a very beautiful woman, and it was the custom of the time for a ruler--there are historical illustrations of this--to take that beautiful woman and slay the husband in order that there may be a marriage with this beautiful woman. Because they had a high regard for marriage, just not a high regard for the life of the husband. And so as they approached the land, Abram has this little scheme, and so he says, now when the Egyptians see you, they're going to say you're beautiful, and they're going to say this is Abram's wife, and let's kill him that we may have her.

But I want you to please say that you are my sister, so that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may live on account of you. In other words, Abram knew her civil rights would not be respected, so to save his own skin, he devises this little ploy and he uses a half-truth, which was a whole falsehood. Because actually, Sarah was his sister, his half-sister.

They had the same father but different mothers. So he said, say you are my sister, but he intended for them to understand that as a full sister. So it was a falsehood, though it was a half-truth.

Now there are people who apologize for Abram. Some of them have said why he wanted to cautiously conceal the truth, whatever that might mean. And perhaps he acted in obedience to some divine initiative, someone else has said.

And still someone else has said that he dissembled over the relationship between himself and Sarah to preserve her chastity. But the only objection and the primary objection to all of these things is that the story in the Bible represents Abram as being far more concerned about his own safety than about his wife's chastity. The only thing he was interested in was his own skin.

And so the result is that he devises this scheme. And one of the striking things about it to me is this, and I say this in the light of a statement that Foster made in his well-known essay on the aversion of men of taste to evangelical religion. And he wrote, The failures of chosen men of God upon a closer examination reveal them as sins of weakness arising from unguarded strength.

Now what does that tell us about Abram? Well that tells us, if that's true, and there is some justification for it I think, the tendency of men is to sin in areas of their strength by not guarding themselves there. And if that is true, then we must conclude that Abram had a tremendous capacity for deception. It was very easy for him to deceive people.

And in this unguarded moment of weakness in his sin and out of fellowship, proper relationship with the Lord, he has allowed that skill of deception to manifest itself. And he thought up this little scheme, which is a rather clever scheme. He can say what he argues is truth, but at the same time save his skin by what is really a falsehood.

Now I think there may be some truth to this because you know Abram had a grandson. And his grandson, because these things run in the families you know, father's deceptive, children often are deceptive. If the father is a godly man, the children are often godly men.

But Abram had a grandson and his name was Jacob. And Jacob means supplant. He was the deceiver par excellence.

And you can see in the family this tendency to deceive, skip, skill, it's intellectual skill to deceive. But it was weak. And so Abram, exercising his strength in an unguarded way, sins further.

The incident is described in the Bible not to make Abram look bad, so much as it is to make God look good. And that is what I want you to be sure to get in spite of what we are saying about Abram. Because in the latter part of this chapter, it is the greatness of the mercy of God that comes before us.

Now we read in verse 14, it came about, when Abram came into Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. They did exactly as Abram prophesied. And Pharaoh's officials saw her and they said hallelujah to Pharaoh over her.

Now that, I'm freely paraphrasing the Hebrew, it does mean to praise in that sense, to express great praise. She was a beautiful woman. She was the Elizabeth Taylor of her day.

And so the woman was taken from Abram and taken into Pharaoh's harem. And there she was placed, preparatory to ultimately becoming Pharaoh's wife. Furthermore, it was the custom for the one who took the woman to give a dowry and to give presents.

And so Abram is getting rich because of this little ploy which he's managed to think up. And I can just imagine him saying, the Lord is blessing me. Now that is the way a lot of Christians act, you know.

They know that they have disobeyed the Lord and then because certain things in their circumstances seem to be working well, they say, the Lord is blessing me. I've known many churches set up on foundations contrary to the Word of God that do not preach the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, but which have crowds that are coming to them saying, the Lord is blessing us. But God never blesses except in accordance with His Word.

And so Abram had every kind of material reason to say, my duplicity, he didn't call it that, but my skill and cleverness is really working. Sarah's being protected. She's in the harem.

Her chastity has not been disturbed yet, and I'm getting rich, and everything seems to be going very well. The Lord has led me and guided me. But the beneficence of the world is no substitute for fellowship with God.

Be assured of that. And when we are out of step with Him, though the money is pouring in and though all of life seems to be one great bed of roses, you can be sure that deep down in the heart of Abram there was trouble. And so the issues of sin continue to mount.

And now the plagues come. Now you might expect the plagues to come to Abram's house, but isn't it interesting? They come to Pharaoh's. That would indicate Pharaoh was not without blame.

He should not have done what he did, of course. He took the woman, made her one of his wives, or intended to. But obviously the one who is most at fault in this account so far as we can tell is Abram.

But the plagues happen to Pharaoh and Pharaoh's house. Now there is a beautiful scripture in the Bible which some of our friends in some segments of evangelicalism have forgotten. It reads like this, For the Lord of hosts has planned, and who can frustrate it? And as for his stretched out hand, who can turn it back? We do not worship a confused deity.

He works according to his purposes. And we do not worship a frustrated deity. He always accomplishes his purposes.

And his purpose is to bless through Abram. To give Abram a seed. In fact, a supernatural seed.

When Abram has reached the stage where he cannot have natural children, children naturally, he will be given in a supernatural way through Sarah, a seed. Isaac. From whom? The seed.

The Lord Jesus will ultimately come. And so the plagues begin to fall upon Pharaoh's house. Now what they were we are not told.

They may have, this word incidentally is used in the stem, the Hebrew stem in which it is found here, always, so far as I remember, of disease. Plagues of disease. And so it's possible that they were forms of disease or maybe even forms of sexual disease that prevented any kind of consummation of the union with Sarah.

But at any rate, the plagues fell upon the house of Pharaoh. And when the Pharaoh began to ask about this, because he had enough of a sense of the deity to know that when things were happening like this it might be because of some god, or whether Sarah divulged this to him. How he came to know we don't know, but he finally found out why.

And he rebuked Abram. And he came to him and said, what's this that you've done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say she's my sister, so that I took her from my wife? Now here's your wife, take her and go. And so Abram, humiliated by the scorn of the worldling, if you've ever been rebuked by someone who is not a Christian, there is nothing worse.

Nothing worse than to be rebuked by a non-Christian. Because you, the Christian, who've made such great professions, have not lived in accordance with your own professions. And so Abram rebuked and humiliated by the scorn of Pharaoh, so far as the text of the Bible is concerned, lives in embarrassed silence, saying nothing.

His mouth is shut. Over in the Psalms, the psalmist speaking about incidents like this concerning the children of Israel says, he permitted no man to oppress them, and he reproveth kings for their sakes. Do not touch my anointed ones, and do my prophets no harm.

And Pharaoh learned the truth, do not touch my anointed ones, and consequently the plagues fell upon him. And he sent Abram out with an escort. Abram's failure.

Incidentally, you may have read in the newspapers recently about the court-martial of the century, who is being court-martialed because he reads the Bible when he's on duty. Well, I must confess, my sympathies do not lie with that man who calls himself a born-again Christian. My sympathies lie with the Air Force.

Because I don't think a man into whose hands is committed the safety of the people with whom he is, of whom he is a part, I don't think he ought to be reading the Bible when he's on sentry duty. And when I read that in the newspapers, I must confess I was embarrassed and ashamed. For us who are Christians, that someone can hide behind the Bible and the claim that he's a born-again Christian, but who does not do his duty in the Air Force.

Now let me say this as I close. Abram's failure gives some important insight into human nature. But there is especially illustrated here the danger of compromise amid the dancing circumstances of life.

You can just see the steps in Abram's fall. He came into the land and he was disappointed. His faith declined as he saw this terrible dilemma, stay in the land because this is the place of blessing, but the famine is in the land, what shall I do? Finally, he has made up his mind, he has not consulted the Lord,

and he goes down into Egypt.

And now having left the place of blessing as he goes down into Egypt, he deviates to worldly schemes and policies, specious equivocation, she is my sister. The deception practiced leads to a clouding of his moral vision, and he remains in the land out of the proper relationship with the Lord God. And isn't it interesting too that when a man falls into sin, and the next sin follows because it gets easier and easier and easier, that sin leads inevitably to selfishness.

That is, sin leads to concern about ourselves, self-preservation. And so having abandoned trust in God, he is thinking about himself, about me. But finally, he is caught in his own toils, and ultimately must suffer the embarrassment and shame set forth there in the passage.

May I conclude by saying this. All of that is true, but to my mind, the greatest lesson of this entire section is the lovely picture that it gives us of the protection of God's elect, even in the midst of these trails of disobedience to the Lord. Because when God went down to Egypt, you might have read in the Bible, when Abram went down to Egypt, you might have read in the Bible, but God stayed in the land of Canaan.

But no, he went down to Egypt too. That is, his presence was felt there. Furthermore, when Sarah was given into the hands of Pharaoh, we might have read of some kind of union between the two, but we didn't, because God protected Sarah.

It is through Sarah that the seed is to come. And then God delivered both Abram and Sarah from the land of Egypt, in his own time, in his own way. Now isn't it striking that the Bible says, in Isaiah chapter 41 and verse 8, that Abram is the friend of God.

Isn't that striking? My friend, God says about Abram. Now if God can speak of Abram as his friend, then perhaps he can maintain us in relationship to him as well. This sovereign mercy guided and directed all of his ultimate circumstances.

And this man, amid the shame and confusion, but of the lesson learned, for a time, for he will commit the same kind of sin later on, preserved him and he's brought back into the land for the consummation of God's purposes. The Apostle Paul says, no temptation has overtaken you, but such as is common to man. And God is faithful.

He will not allow you to be tempted beyond that you are able, but will with the temptation provide the way of escape that you may be able to endure it. My Christian friend, learn the lesson of Abram. If God has given you a vision, then the capacity for living according to that vision lies in the sovereign grace and mercy of God.

You see, Abram's real difficulty in the final analysis was inability to apply his faith to the circumstances of life. He could not reason that since God has called me into this land and has given me these great promises, it is here that I shall be blessed. And famines may come, but I have God, and he's not promised me riches, he's promised me spiritual blessing.

May God deliver us from compromise, expediency, all of the schemes of the arm of the flesh with which so many of us are familiar, and enable us to trust in the Word of God, regardless of the circumstances. And then your environment will be the environment of trust. If you're here this morning and you've never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, of course you don't have this sovereign God, whose mercy enfolds his saints, in your experience at the moment.

And so we invite you to recognize your lost condition, and that Christ has died for sins, and that there is offered to all full and free forgiveness through the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. May God, through the Holy Spirit, bring conviction of your lost condition, and may you flee to the cross of Christ, trusting the Lord Jesus. And he will give you the forgiveness of sins, bring you into the family of God, make you one of his children, make you a priest of God so you can approach him directly and bring your petitions to him.

Come to him, put your trust in him, believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. Let's stand for the benediction. We're thankful to thee, Lord, for these important lessons that come to us from the life of Abram, the great exemplar of faith.

We see ourselves, Lord, so often in the experiences of this great man. We know that in us, that is in our flesh, there dwells no good thing. Deliver us from ourselves.

Enable us to trust thee, Jehovah Jireh, and learn the provision that thou hast for us. For those who are here without Christ, we appeal, Lord, to thee, bring them to him. Give them the joy of salvation and the joy of the presence of God in their lives.

May grace, mercy, and peace be ours through the Lord Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

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