**God’s Call to Abram**

November 5, 2017

Genesis 12:1-13:4

Key Verse 12:2 “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.”

Last week, through Samuel’s message, we learned that God made a new covenant with Noah’s family and all life on earth. God promised that he would never destroy the earth by water again, even though every inclination of human thought was evil. God sealed the covenant with a rainbow. The rainbow is a sign of hope between humanity and God. God would begin a new plan of redemption for the world by calling one family and one nation to bless the whole world. How does God begin this redemptive plan?

From human point of view, who do you think is the most likely candidate for this mission? Most likely, we would think of a young, healthy, wealthy, capable and good-looking person who might appear to be the best fit for this job. However, God’s way and thought are so different from ours (Isaiah 55:9). In fact, it is often the exact opposite of what we think and do. Someone once said, “God has a habit of calling a nobody and making him somebody”. Simply speaking, God’s plan beings with one old man: Abram and his obedience to God. Let’s learn the faith and obedience of Abram and the importance of our obedience to God so that we can become a blessing to our generation.

**First, God called Abram to leave his family, people and homeland.**

In Genesis 12:1-3, “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. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you’”.

Abram’s family lived in Mesopotamia beyond the Euphrates River. They worshipped and served other gods (Joshua 24:2). Abram’s father was Terah. He took Abram, Sarai (Abram’s wife) and Lot (Abram’s nephew) and set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But they settled in Haran, and Terah died there. After his death, God commanded Abram to leave his country, his people and his father’s household and go to the land he will show him.

How many of us would leave behind everything that is familiar to us and just go without knowing our destination? The concept of family meant everything to a person living in the time of Abram. In that time, family units were strongly knit; it was unusual for family members to live hundreds of miles apart from each other. In addition, we’re not told anything about the religious life of Abraham and his family prior to his calling. The people of Ur and Haran were pagans who worshipped the ancient Babylonian pantheon of gods, in particular the moon god, Sin. Given that fact, it seems reasonable that Terah was a pagan idolater.

Like in Abram’s time, family also means everything to us in our time. Not only do we depend on our family for all our needs but we also equate family to comfort, security and even social status in our society. Leaving our family can be understood as leaving our comfort zone, which is very challenging to follow through. However, there is spiritual significance of leaving family.

When we begin the life of faith, we must break away from our past lives. Family, home, my own country are not necessarily bad. But when we depend on these human things, we cannot wholly trust and obey God. For some people, to go from our own country and our father’s house is a spiritual decision which results in a new and better relationship with our human families. We become independent by becoming dependent on God. For others, it means actually leaving physically, breaking human ties. In every case, the earthly things which we once trusted and to which we once clung for security and help must be surrendered when we begin a new life in God. When our hearts and feet are deeply caught in the sinful world, God calls us to repent and leave a life of sin and turn to God. We need to live God-centered life.

**Second, God promised Abram land, blessings and hope for the future.**

God introduces a promise, a blessing, and hope for the future. For through Abram, God promises descendants, land, blessings, and fame. Bible scholars call this the great Abrahamic Covenant. God will repeat it to Abram, as he will to his son, Isaac, and grandson Jacob, and later to Moses. God is creating a nation, a people of God. And it all hinges on one person’s commitment to believe, to follow him and to obey him. That is why Abraham is a pillar of faith, a role model for us. That is why the New Testament mentions him some 80 times, more than any other Old Testament character, and why Paul tells Christians they are the true descendants of Abraham (Galatians 3:6-9).

When God commanded Abram to leave his homeland, he promised to give the land that he would show him—Canaan—as inheritance for his descendants. Let’s read the key verse Genesis 12:2 “I will make you into a great nation, and I will make your name great and you will be a blessing”. The meaning of this promise is that Abram’s descendants would become a chosen nation—Israel— of God, and through this one nation a saviour of the world would come. And this promised saviour is Jesus Christ who saves all mankind from sins including Gentiles, you and me.

These promises of a land, blessings and hope for the future are all interconnected. Let’s think about God’s hope for Abram, who was a hopeless 75 year old man. As I mentioned earlier, we tend to choose young and capable people for important tasks because they look promising and we have hope in their capabilities. On the other hand, choosing an old man for any job is quite unusual and rather ridiculous. Abram was in fact an old and childless man. We put hope in our strength and youthfulness, but there is not much hope in such an old man. In spite of Abram’s weaknesses and flaws, God kept his promise and bless him unconditionally. God faithfully fulfilled his promise of an heir—Isaac.

**Third, Abram obeyed God’s command willingly, not hesitantly.**

What really makes Abraham special is that he obeyed God. Verse 4 records that, after God called Abram, he went “as the LORD had told him.” This act of faith is so impressive that the author of Hebrews “enshrines” Abraham in the Faith Hall of Fame: “By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going” (Hebrews 11:8).

We can see that Abram had faith in God, who called him to leave his country, people and family. His obedience was shown in his action; he left immediately after he heard the command from God. We are not told that Abram questioned God’s calling, doubted his instruction or hesitated to obey it thoroughly. He acted at once and left everything behind. He recognized God’s sovereignty and holiness; he feared God. He had faith. It did not mean that he blindly followed God. He simply obeyed because he trusted in God as the sovereign Lord over his life. He trusted God just like we trust in our parents or even a driver who takes us to our travel destination. For example, Calvin said that when he was young, his parents took him to an airplane. He did not know where he was going, but he slept most of the way. He trusted in his parents and did not worry. When he woke up, he was in Canada.

When Abram arrived in the land of Canaan he couldn’t settle down there because the Canaanites were already living in the land. This could be so discouraging if we look at it from human point of view. Abram could begin to doubt God’s leading and complain about it. God knew that Abram could become doubtful and discouraged by what he saw. Therefore, God appeared to him and assured him, saying, “to your offspring I will give you this land.” Though the land was fully occupied, Abram believed in God’s word that, one day, it would become an inheritance for his offspring—who were not yet born at this point. Abram showed his faith in God by traveling through the land. He built an altar where God appeared to him. Building an altar meant he worshipped God, right where God appeared to him. He lived in the land of unbelievers, but he was not afraid of worshipping the true God who was with him.

Abram lived by faith in the land of Canaan among hostile neighbours by building an altar. However, Abram compromised his life of faith by depending on his own way, rather than on God’s. His motive in going to Egypt was different from that of going to Canaan; it was due to famine in Canaan in search for food and shelter from the neighbouring country. He went according to his own calculation and decision without seeking direction or depending on God. As a result, he got into a big trouble after his lies about his relationship with his wife was exposed. He was afraid of being killed, and so he he lied about his relationship with his wife. He used his wife as a shield to protect himself due to fear of these hostile and godless men. Pharaoh kicked him out of his palace as God intervened to protect Abram’s family by inflicting serious disease on Pharaoh and his household. Abram showed his repentance by returning to the place where he previously built an altar to the Lord (the place between Bethel and Ai) and called on the name of the Lord again. Despite Abram’s weakness in Egypt and compromises in living faithfully in the hostile land, God protected him.

**Fourth, God calls us to be an Abram in this generation.**

From this message, I learned that Abram obeyed God by faith as he trusted God and looked forward to the great promises of God towards his descendants. It is amazing that Abram obeyed God by leaving his country, people and family when he did not know where he was going or had any child. His faith was that he trusted in God’s promise in spite of his present reality. He lived in the promised land as a stranger with no land, but he believed that the land would later belong to his offspring. Obeying God’s calling is not only for oneself. God’s promise is not just for Abram but for all who are descendants of Abram through Jesus Christ. Galatians 3:14 says, “He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.” In order to inherit God’s blessing, we need to follow Abram’s footsteps.

Like Abram, I believe that God has called me to give me hope for the future and to make me a blessing to my generation. He wants me to trust in him totally and obeyed his words. God called Abram when he was a hopeless 75 year-old man. Similarly, in spite of my weakness, God called me by his grace to become a shepherd for young students even though I do not have a seminary degree or university degree. After I got married to Sheila and moved to Toronto, I did not expect at all that I would find God’s calling here, let alone accept it. In my first year in Toronto, I came to UBF worship service just to support Sheila and have harmony in our marriage. I did not know that God provided the promised land for me and my family. I pray that I and my family will live by faith like our Father Abram in the promised land by fixing our eyes on what is unseen and eternal.

In conclusion, God began his redemptive plan with one man, who obeyed him fully in spite of his weaknesses. The obedience of Abram is so important that God’s plan to create a nation, a people of God, hinges on his commitment to believe, obey and follow him. God calls each one of us to obey and follow him as Abram did so that we can become a blessing for this generation and participate in his redemptive work for the world. Once, there was a Sunday school teacher named Edward Kimball. One day one of his students did not come to his class. But, the Holy Spirit put a burden in his heart and commanded him to go and visit this student: D.L. Moody, a shoe salesman in his store. Therefore, he obeyed and went. Through the obedience of this one man, God blessed D.L. Moody, who later became known as the greatest evangelist in the 19th century. D.L. Moody preached and won over about 1 million people for Christ. The following quote is what he said about his student. He had no hope for this student, but he obeyed. Therefore, without the obedience of Edward Kimball, there would be no D.L. Moody.

I pray that you will answer God’s call with obedience and begin a life of faith with him today.