

"Abram's Road Trip To Egypt"
Sermon Series on
A Faithful God for a Fallen People #3
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(Gen. 12:10-13:4)

Introduction.

Many years ago when our kids were growing up and we lived in Colorado, Lorie and I decided to take a two-week vacation. The main purpose of the trip was to travel to Pennsylvania to attend a family wedding. However, when we decided that we would *drive* back east for the wedding, Lorie's creative imagination began to kick into gear. She said, "Well, since we'll be driving, you know, we've never seen Mount Rushmore, and it's just a little to the north from where we are and it's kind of along the way."

A week went by, and then she said, "Well, you know, our friends who have a lake house in Minnesota have invited us to come visit them. It's kind of on the way, too. And Wall Drug and the Corn Palace are two things you don't want to miss!" So we added them to our list of things to see and do.

A little while later I said, "Well, you know, we've got some friends outside Chicago who have invited us to come and see them for several years now. We could maybe take in Chicago on the way as well." Another week went by and Lorie said, "Well, since we're going all the way to Pennsylvania for the wedding, the boys have never seen Niagara Falls and Fort Ticonderoga, and it's just up the road a couple of hundred miles from where we'll be."

Well, 4,000 miles later, we returned in tact as a family. And we didn't lose or leave anyone behind (although we thought about it a few times!). I was talking with a friend about our vacation one day, and we both decided that the most common statement made by American parents during long road trips is, "Am I going to have to stop this car and come back there?!" I must confess that we did create some great memories with that road trip back east all those years ago.

This morning we read of another road trip, but it wasn't a road trip east to attend a family wedding. Rather, it was a road trip south to escape a famine. As we take a look at this passage in Genesis, there are two matters that I want to highlight for you in particular: Abraham's Famine; and Abraham's Failure.

I. Abraham's Famine.

In the passage we read, "*Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe*" (12:10). You'll recall that in the earlier part of chapter 12, Abram, whose name was later

changed to Abraham, responded to God's call to leave his family and his homeland in the city of Ur and travel to the land of Canaan. The Lord promised to give to him this land as an inheritance. But we're told that soon after his arrival in Canaan, a severe famine hit the land. The rains that usually fell in the latter part of the year failed, and the crops were burned up with the sun's heat before the harvest.

If a similar calamity were to hit us today, we would draw upon food supplies held in storage here at home or from abroad. But Abraham had no such resources available to him. He was a stranger in a strange land. He was surrounded by suspicious and hostile people, and he had the responsibility of large flocks and herds to take care of. It was no small matter for Abraham to stand face-to-face with the sudden threat of a famine. So he decided to take his family and his herds to Egypt. Egypt's food supply was plentiful and more reliable because the water from the Nile River valley was usually very dependable.

Still, it's surprising the read that so soon after Abraham arrived in Canaan and the Lord gave him the promise of the land that he was so quick to abandon it. The man who had traveled all the way from Chaldea to Canaan, a journey of about 1,000 miles, simply in response to the call of God, was now afraid to trust the Lord in a time of famine. I believe the famine was sent to test Abraham's faith, and God wanted to see if the patriarch had confidence in the Lord's provision. But Abraham chose to seek relief from his problems rather than profit by the trial.

However, before we're too quick to judge Abraham, we should stop and ask ourselves: *How often do I seek the easy way of relief rather than trust in God's provision in the midst of some difficulty or trial? How soon do I give up on God's promises when the day of hardship comes my way?* Often we, too, are tempted to look back on the past and complain that it was better before we decided to follow God.

We think, "I lost that business deal because I was honest." Or "I lost that friendship because I wasn't willing to go along with the crowd." Or "I lost that special someone in my life because I refused to sleep with them, all because now I'm trying to follow the Lord. Where is the abundant life you promised me, God?" we ask.

Trouble often follows blessing in order to test our motives. It happened all the time in the pages of Scripture, and it happens in your life and mine. It's easy for us to believe God when things are going well, but it's in the time of trial, when a famine comes our way, that the metal of our faith is tested.

You shouldn't be surprised if a famine of some kind comes to you. It's not evidence of God's anger with you. Rather, it's intended to take you deeper into a life of faith in the faithful provision of a loving heavenly Father. Just as a strong wind makes the tree dig its roots deeper into the soil, so the famines of our lives

cause us to dig deeper roots of faith. That's because only God can ultimately provide for us what we really need the most in life.

Are you going through a trial right now? Don't doubt the Lord. Avoid the quick fix, and trust in Christ in the middle of your struggle. It may just be His way of taking you deeper into His heart of love.

II. Abraham's Failure.

There are occasions in the Bible when God told someone to seek temporary asylum in Egypt. For example, later on in Genesis 46 Jacob was assured by God that he shouldn't fear going down to Egypt and that God would be with him. And an angel of the Lord also appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him to take his wife Mary and their son Jesus and flee to Egypt for a period of time.

However, it doesn't appear that Abraham received any such divine direction on this occasion. He simply acted on his own initiative. Abraham looked at his difficulties and became paralyzed with fear, and he grabbed at the first means of deliverance he could find. It would have been better for Abraham to have thrown the responsibility back on God and to have said, "Hey, You brought me here, and You bear the responsibility for helping me to figure this out, Lord. I'll stay put until I clearly know what You want me to do."

But that's not what Abraham did, is it? He lost his faith in God's provision, and he took matters into his own hands and went down to Egypt. In the process he also lost his courage and his honor, and he persuaded his wife Sarah to say that she was his sister. He had heard of the immorality of the Egyptians, and he feared that they might kill him in order to gain possession of Sarah, who, even at the age she had reached, still possessed considerable beauty and charm.

There was an element of truth in the statement that Sarah was Abraham's sister. She was in fact his half-sister, being the daughter of his father but not of his mother. But it was intended to deceive, and it certainly misled the Egyptians. And all this put his wife in danger. Officials in Pharaoh's court soon noticed Sarah's beauty, and she was quickly taken to the royal palace and added to Pharaoh's harem.

How like Abraham we are! When we're afraid, sometimes we respond to danger with deception or compromise. We're afraid of what people will think, or we're concerned about what it will cost us. So we lie, we deceive, and we cover up. Have you done this recently yourself? What is God trying to say to you about what you did or said in that situation? And what do you need to do now to rectify this falsehood?

In the case of Abraham, God in His mercy intervened, and He inflicted a serious disease upon Pharaoh and his household. We're not told exactly what this disease was, but the Hebrew word that is used here often refers to skin diseases

such as boils. In any event, Pharaoh soon realized that taking Sarah into his harem was the cause of his illness, and he summoned Abraham. Pharaoh confronted the patriarch, and his anger was expressed in the rapid succession of accusatory questions and a terse order that Abraham be expelled from the country.

Abraham remained silent and offered no justification for his action, and he and Sarah were quickly escorted out of Egypt. Here we see an example of a person who didn't know God being more righteous than the one who did. The person who knew God was rebuked by the one who didn't. It's embarrassing whenever unbelievers act like Christians and we don't. Abraham's cowardly act endangered and dishonored his wife who had faithfully followed his lead in leaving their homeland in response to the call of God, and it put at risk the possibility of their having a child together.

Whenever we lose our faith and start to panic, we often begin to neglect, and even put at risk, the most important people in our lives. All too often we're prepared to sacrifice the people who are nearest and dearest to us, if only we can escape. How selfish we are. Expediency leads to lying and deception, and we sacrifice what is most important on the altar of self-preservation. And one sin leads to another.

Fortunately, back in Canaan, Abraham returned to Bethel where he had previously worshipped God before. The first time he was there, Abraham built an altar out of stones to the Lord. His failure in Egypt prompted him to return to this place of spiritual intimacy, and once again he sought the face and the will of God. And there he realized that the time he spent in Egypt was time wasted.

When trouble comes your way, it's wise to seek out a place of spiritual intimacy and return to where you felt close to God in your life before. Do you have a place like that where you can go? For some people it's the mountains. For others it's the beach. (Isn't it great that we live in a state where we have both available to us?!) If you're struggling in your walk with the Lord right now, let me encourage you to seek out a physical place of spiritual intimacy. And, if you're able, consider going back to that place where you felt close to God once before in your life. And be like Abraham. Even build a little monument with rocks to symbolize how God met you there in that place at that time. And ask Him to visit you again with His Holy Spirit once more.

Conclusion.

What can we learn from this passage? There at least 3 lessons that I want to mention as we close. *First*, this passage reminds us that *the promises of God are trustworthy and sure*. Even when Abraham was faithless, travelling down to Egypt and putting Sarah at risk, God remained faithful to them. Despite the irresponsible actions of Abraham, God intervened to accomplish His purpose and

ensure that His Word would not fail. That's a great comfort to know when we realize how prone we are to wander away from God ourselves. The Lord will remain faithful even when we are faithless.

The *second* lesson I want you to learn is that *the great heroes of the faith are people with feet of clay, just like you and me*. The Bible is amazing in that it doesn't gloss over the mistakes and imperfections of the people who appear in its pages. Rather, they're portrayed as they really were, warts and all. Here we see in Abraham a person who had an amazing capacity for faith, but who also had a tendency to be duplicitous and deceptive. The good news in all of this is that God chooses to use fallen people like you and me to accomplish His work in the world, and the saints of the Bible were sinners who needed grace just as much as we do.

The *final* lesson I want to mention is that this passage teaches us that *lying and deception are inconsistent with a life of faith*. Jesus said to His disciples, "*Let your 'yes' be 'yes' and your 'no' be 'no'*" (Mt. 5:37). Integrity and honesty are characteristics we should cultivate in our lives, and the person who claims to be a follower of Jesus should be known for the truthfulness of their speech and the integrity of their character.

I close with this. There was once a professor at Vanderbilt University named Dr. Madison Sarrat who taught mathematics. Routinely he would say to his students before they took a test, "Today you are actually going to take two tests. One will be in trigonometry, and the other is going to be in honesty. If you are going to fail one of these tests, fail the test in trigonometry."¹

Every day you and I face tests in our lives of one kind or another, and they have consequences both in this life and the next. And we must decide whether or not we will live in the truth. Think about Abraham and what it cost him to lie and be deceptive, and make a commitment today that this week you will, with God's help, attempt to tell the truth and live with integrity. God will be with you and He will help you do it, because He is a faithful God for a fallen people. Amen.

¹As told by Jim Singleton in a sermon he preached I once read entitled, "Daring to Live in Truth."