Leave Behind To Follow Ahead — Delivery Transcript

Genesis 11:27–12:3 (CSB) · Wes Terry · Sunday, October 22, 2023 · *Faith & Its Reward*

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Alright, so we're going to be in Genesis chapter eleven. When I left for the sabbatical, we were traveling through the book of Genesis. We had gotten all the way up to Genesis chapter eleven, and now we're jumping right back in. And if you've been watching the headlines and keeping up with what's going on, it's no secret that things are very tense right now. There's a lot of brokenness in our world, and it's a fresh reminder of how our world is broken. Our world is filled with brokenness and we see it everywhere.

It's not just that you have this war in Israel between Israel and Hamas. You see it at other levels as well. The social fabric that used to hold us together as a nation seems to be fraying. We don't have things in common anymore that we can kind of share together. The institutions of our country are kind of dissolving right before our very eyes. Even big powerful institutions like our educational system and our judiciary system, there are compromises and integrity issues and things that make it seem like they're not as strong and stable as they used to be.

Our economy is uncertain at best and feels sometimes like it's on the razor's edge of just imploding all together. People are hurting financially because of inflation and all the things that go with it. Our politicians are—what do you say about the politicians? I mean, you don't want to say they're all corrupt. I'm sure maybe one or two of them is okay, but the political institution itself is broken. Can we agree on that? The system is not working the way that it's supposed to work. People are angry, we're polarized, people are anxious.

Mental health issues are on the rise, human virtue is on the decline, our world is filled with brokenness. And it seems like human history is almost like a cycle of that brokenness. There was a book written by a group of sociologists, I can't remember their name—Neil Howe,

maybe, and somebody else. They wrote a book called The Fourth Turning, and it was written a long time ago, but they kind of identified a cycle that great cultures go through. And this is a crass way to summarize it, but it's essentially that good times eventually go bad and good men or strong men and women eventually go soft.

And when those good times go bad, or when those good, strong men and women go soft, then those good times usually go bad. Maybe you've heard that phrase before. Good times create soft men. Soft men create hard times. Hard times create hard men, and hard men create good times. You can almost see that cycle repeat itself over and over again in human history. And the reason I'm bringing that up is because in the book of Genesis I think you can see a similar kind of cycle. You don't have to use that language, but it's as though the cycle goes something like this.

That God creates something originally good. When that design of God is embraced, there is human flourishing and righteousness and peace. Then Satan comes along and he counterfeits what God creates. And eventually, when that counterfeit becomes attractive enough through temptation and seduction, mankind chooses to counterfeit at the expense of God's design. And when they choose the counterfeit, when you take God's design and say, "No thanks," and you choose the counterfeit to God's design and say, "This will work better," it invites brokenness. It invites brokenness into your life individually, and when enough people do that for a long enough period of time, it invites brokenness at a societal level.

And when that brokenness persists long enough, it inevitably invites God's judgment and destruction. And you see that cycle in the book of Genesis. We saw it with the flood. We're going to see it again throughout the Old Testament. What's interesting, though, is that that reset button, just like it is in human culture and human societies, God presses a reset button when that cycle gets to a point of destruction and judgment, and he usually chooses one man or a group or a particular subset of people, a remnant you might say, and he presses the reset button through judgment and preserves that remnant through that judgment to start things over again.

And that you might call a counterculture is who and what God uses to rebuild what was lost through the brokenness. You see this in Genesis 3 when Adam and Eve sin against God, they experience the curse and brokenness, they hide themselves because of their nakedness, but then God presses that reset button and he gives them clothes to cover their nakedness. That promise that God made in Genesis 3:15—that even though you're broken and cursed because of sin, I'm going to send someone from the seed of the woman who's going to crush the head of the serpent, and he's going to restore what's been lost—that promised seed seems to be Abel.

They have two kids, Cain and Abel. Abel offers the right sacrifice to God. Cain embraces the counterfeit. And when he embraces the counterfeit, he's overcome with a murderous rage in

his heart, and he ends up killing Abel. So it looks like God's plan has been thwarted, and what's going to happen now? And God graciously presses the reset button and you have a new son born named Seth. And it's from the line of Seth that that promise of God and that redemptive plan continues. But it doesn't take long until you get to Genesis chapter 6 and the world has gone bad again, even the godly line of Seth.

There are not a lot of godly men left. The daughters of men are marrying the sons of God, or the sons of God are marrying with the daughters of men, and the wickedness just got worse and worse and worse. The thought of every person was only evil continually, and so what does God do? He says, "I'm going to destroy the world through a flood." And he sends the flood, but before he sends the flood, he chooses one man, one family, and saves that family through the ark and presses the reset button and starts over with Noah.

But then Noah gets out of the ark, and what does he do? He rejects God's design for the counterfeit, gets drunk in a tent, does something he shouldn't do. His sons do something they shouldn't do. And as a result, brokenness enters this new world that God had made. And that really culminates with where we were last left in the book of Genesis, which is the tower of Babel. And in the tower of Babel, you had a bunch of unholy, wicked people who rejected God's design for greatness and said, "We want to make a name great for ourselves."

And so they built this big tower, and God comes down and judges them. He presses the reset button, he scatters the nations, and he confuses their languages. And He chooses one man named Abram, who we're going to be looking at over the next several months, and he forms from him a counter-culture to continue his agenda and advance his covenant promise. So in every broken culture, the point is in every broken culture God has a counterculture. And he's doing what he did in Genesis, he's doing today. And we can be part of that counterculture if we will have ears to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying to us.

And so that's what we're going to do over the next several weeks. We're going to preach through Genesis chapter 12 to probably about 15 for this series and see how God works through the people of faith and how the people of faith journey through what God's calling them to do in this counterculture. And we typically preach through books of the Bible in our church. We believe in what's called expository preaching, not because I lack creativity and can't figure out what to preach every week, although it is nice to just have it planned out for you, but because of a conviction we have in our church about the nature of the Bible.

We believe the Bible is inspired by God. It's uniquely by the Holy Spirit—the Holy Spirit inspired Moses to write what he wrote in the book of Genesis. And that it's the most relevant, practical, helpful thing that we can do with our time because no other book is like this book. And I've been amazed how the Lord—during the sabbatical especially—has used this story of Abraham that we're about to study and he did a work in my heart and planted a new seed of

faith in my heart. And has gotten me eager and passionate and excited about where God is taking me in the future and where God is going to be taking our church in the future.

And I'm praying that what God did through his word in my life, he will do in our church as we journey through this book. So Genesis chapter 11, if you don't know the context, the tower of Babel has happened. God has scattered the nations because of their wickedness. And in Genesis chapter 11, verse 10, you're going to see a genealogy. And everybody loves the genealogies because they're so interesting and easy to read. And I know they're not, but they're important. And the reason they're important is because what—especially in the book of Genesis—this genealogy is saying is God hasn't stopped his plan.

He made a promise in Genesis 3:15. He's continuing that promise through this line. The nations were scattered, they messed it up, but God isn't lost. God isn't surprised. He's continuing his agenda. The line starts with a guy named Shem. He's one of the holy sons of Noah. And it culminates with a guy named Terah. And that's going to be the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran. We're going to pick up our text in verse 27, Genesis chapter 11, verse 27, and read through probably to verse 30. Before I read the text, this is just a small point I want to make, but I think it's an important one.

All of the chaos and madness that would have been characteristic of that world during that time did not undermine the reality of God's redemptive agenda being sovereignly fixed and as sure as it could be. I don't have another way to say that. In all of the messiness and all of the chaos and the disruption that sin had brought into their world and brokenness, God was still sovereign and his plan was secure. And I just want to encourage us with that because I know we're in a cultural moment where there's all kinds of craziness.

And you don't have to look to the headlines in your life. You can probably look to areas of your life where you'd say, "Lord, I don't know what you're doing. I don't know what's going on and I don't know who I can trust, and I don't know—do you even hear me when I pray?" It looks confusing, it looks chaotic, but even in the midst of that chaos and confusion, your God is a sovereign God. He is not surprised. He's not saying, "Oops." He is a sovereign God and his plans are secure.

You're going to see, even though his plans are secure, that sometimes his way of advancing his plan can be surprising. Verse 27: "These are the family records of Terah. Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran. And Haran fathered Lot. Haran died in his native land, in Ur of the Chaldeans, during his father Terah's lifetime, and then Abram and Nahor took wives. Abram's wife was named Sarai, and Nahor's wife was named Milcah, and she was the daughter of Haran, the father of both Milcah and Iscah. And Sarai"—that's Abram's wife —"was unable to conceive; she did not have a child."

Sarai was unable to conceive; she did not have a child. The reason I think this is so instructive is because you've got this backdrop, okay, we kind of already know God's going to press the reset button, who's he going to choose? Last time he chose Noah; he was a righteous man in his generation. Who's he going to choose this time? He chooses Abram. He chooses Terah. He chooses this last line in this godly line of Seth, Terah and his three sons, and it is the most unlikely choice that I think any other person would have made.

And it's a reminder, I think, for us when you think about God using your life and God using our church. In the kingdom of God, when God is advancing his agenda, he often chooses the least qualified people and the most surprising candidates. You may think God can't use me because I have this in my past or I have this problem. I don't have these giftings. In the kingdom, God often uses the least likely, or the least qualified and the most unlikely. And the reason that that's true of Abram is—there's at least two reasons that we can see in our text.

The first reason is because he had a sordid past. We read it earlier; it doesn't really make it explicit, but you get the idea. That Abram and his family are not out of the gate worshipers of Yahweh. They're not worshippers of the covenant-keeping God that they're going to become worshipers of. In their original state there in Ur of the Chaldeans, they were devotees of what you might call—they called it Nannar, the moon god Nannar, there in Ur of the Chaldeans, but they were Akkadian,[1] and so they would have called him Sin.

Which I think is a little on the nose: Abraham was a worshiper of Sin. But that's what they were steeped in. You say, "How do you know that, Wes? The text doesn't say that." Well, if you go to Joshua chapter 24. In Joshua chapter 24, Joshua is giving a recap of the history of Israel. And he says in Joshua chapter 24, verse 2,[2] that our forefathers, Abram and Terah, when they were living beyond the Euphrates, they worshipped other gods. And if you do a little bit of historical background study on the location in which they lived, Ur of the Chaldeans, you will see that it was not just a sort of kind of worship of Sin, or Nannar, whatever his name was, but that it was the central location for that idolatrous worship.

Add to that the name of Abram's dad: Terah is a derivation of the Arabic word for moon. So it's not just like they were kind of Easter-and-Christmas Christians. They were all the way in to this idolatrous worship. The name of Abram's dad was deeply steeped in this idolatry. His wife, Sarai, the same kind of thing, the queen of the moon. This was a family that was steeped in pagan idolatry. If you look in Genesis chapter 11, verse 28 again, it says that Haran died in his native land in Ur of the Chaldeans during Terah's lifetime.

And then a little bit later in verse 31, you're going to see them move from Ur of the Chaldeans to a place called Haran. So verse 31: "Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot (Haran's son), and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram's wife, and they set out together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan." They're going there because God told

them, "I'm taking you to the promised land. You need to stop this idolatry and follow me." But it says, "When they came to Haran, they settled there.

"And Terah lived 205 years and died in Haran." Now why did they stop in Haran? Is it because that was the name of their son who died? Well, maybe. Or is it because Haran was also a well-known established center for the worship of this moon god, Nannar, or Sin? So even though God's calling Abram out, Abram is stuck in this history of worship, worshiping idols. He had a sordid past. And I don't know what all the worship of idols in that religion entailed, but I know usually when Satan has people tied up in idolatry, he has them committing acts and doing things that bring shame upon people.

And so I'm sure Abraham was not the most qualified individual. There's another sense in which he's an unlikely choice, and that is he has a hopeless future. If you look in verse 30, chapter 11, verse 30, it says that Sarai was unable to conceive. She did not have a child. The idea of being barren, for those of you who have ever struggled with infertility, you know how devastating that can be. And it is devastating. But in this culture, in the ancient Near Eastern culture, it wasn't just that not having a child was depressing and disappointing.

It was basically a death sentence to your future economic prosperity. Because your children were the workers of your family farm. Your children were the inheritance. They were going to inherit the responsibilities and the prosperity and the identity that went along with your father's house with your family name. The fact that Abraham and Sarai don't have a child is another way of saying they were hopeless in their future. Barrenness throughout the Old Testament is a metaphor for hopelessness. And so here you have a man who has a sordid past and a hopeless future, and yet that's exactly who the Lord calls.

There's a quote I want to throw up on the screen that kind of paints this picture, if you can throw that back up there. Because I don't have it. So it's just—there it is. "Terah's seed, the entire line appears to be dead. Abram's wife is barren, Haran dies an early death, and Nahor, though he's married, is not recorded as having progeny; neither is Lot. It is simply reported that this family has played out its future and has nowhere else to go." I don't know about you, but that is depressing. And yet that is exactly who the Lord chooses to start his counter-culture.

And so if he can use a man with a sordid past and a hopeless future, he can use me and he can use you. The question is whether or not you'll have ears to hear when the Lord calls. Out of that brokenness, out of that darkness, God brings light and life. But for them to experience that amazing work of God, they had to make a choice. They had to leave certain things behind so that they could follow ahead in what God was going to be leading them to do. And that's really what today's message is about for you, for us as individuals and us as a church: to follow ahead into what the Lord has for us in the future, it will require us leaving certain things behind.

And one of the first things Abraham had to leave behind was his sinful past. You're going to have to leave behind the shame of your past if you're going to follow ahead into God's will for your future. And I don't know what all your past looks like. I know what mine looks like, and there's some things in my past I deeply regret. It's always weird when people from Roby come and sit in church, and I always just want to say, "I promise I'm not the same guy, you know." All the things that I did, the things that I was known for, how could God use someone like me is something I really struggled with.

I'm sure there are things in your past where you would say the same thing. One of my favorite passages of scripture is first Corinthians chapter one, verses twenty six and following. And it's so powerful because it's such a reminder that salvation is not something that you earn. It's not something that you deserve. It's something that is given to you as a gift of God's amazing grace. He doesn't pick you because you're the most popular or the most gifted. In fact, he picked you because you weren't the most popular or the most gifted.

He chooses the weak things in the world to shame the strong. He chooses the foolish things in the world to shame the wise. He says, "Consider your calling: Not many of you are wise from a human perspective. Not many of you were powerful. Not many of you were of noble birth," but God chose you anyway. Why? He chose what's foolish in the world to shame the wise. He chose what's weak in the world to shame the strong. He says he's chosen the things that are nothing, who are insignificant and despised, to bring to nothing those that are viewed as something.

And so if you want God to use your life, why does he do this? So that nobody can boast. The reason God chooses the nobodies, the losers, the outcasts, the hopeless future and the sordid past kind of people is because he's the one who wants all the glory. And he loves to take that arrogance and that pride that is often characteristic of our world and use insignificant people, unwise people by the world's standards to shame the wise and to shame the strong. And so what's necessary is for you to leave yourself back there.

And there's a lot of ways to bring yourself into the future. Some people bring self into the future because of their shame and their regret: "I'm so bad. I'm so unworthy. I've done so many bad things. God can never use me." That sounds humble. It's really arrogant and prideful because you've got too much of yourself going into the future. God can't use you like that. But neither can he use people who say, "Oh God, you have to use me. I always went to church and I'm so holy and none of my friends are as committed as I am.

"I've got this gift and I've got this potential." You can't be used by God in that regard either, but it's just the same pride. It's just a different side of the coin. You've got to leave self in the past. For God to use your life in a great mighty way, you've got to be emptied of yourself. As Taylor talked about last week, it's not just a matter of being committed and all in; you've got

to be totally surrendered and emptied of you so that God can fill your emptiness with his fullness and use you for his purposes.

Abraham had to leave the past behind, but that's not the only thing he had to leave behind. He also had to leave behind some comforts and security in his present. If you look at chapter 12, verse 1, the Lord says to Abram, "I want you to go out from your land." And if you read this in the original language, it's like get yourself out. You yourself get out from where you are. It's a very strong way of saying go: "from your land, from your relatives, from your father's house to the land that I will show you."

Now we can read this, and it just kind of goes over our head—while he's telling Abraham to go, move somewhere else. That sounds kind of fun. That would not have been fun or sounded exciting to a guy like Abraham. Why? Because he's the inheritor of his father's kingdom. He's the one who's going to receive all that economic security and all that future prosperity and all of that identity and being known in the community and being established and all of his relatives and his support system and all of that stuff was present there in Haran and the Lord is saying to Abraham, "You will never see me use you like I've promised to use you unless you get out, unless you leave."

Unless you leave the comfort of your present circumstances, you'll never be able to see the promised future. And this was a future that I think the Lord showed Abraham while he was still in Ur of the Chaldeans. It's something that God did there because otherwise they wouldn't have left. And they were, remember, on their way to Canaan and they stopped here. And they're stuck. And the Lord is saying, "You will always stay stuck unless you leave what you know." And the same is true for us today. These words: land, relatives, father's house.

The father's house was the basis of a person's identity. It was kind of like wrapped up: "This is who I am. This is all I know." It's not like Abram had an iPhone with Zillow and was like looking at the promised land houses: "Well, that looks amazing. You know, I would love this house." Right now we're like looking at land and houses in the country. We want to get a house in the country. So my text message with Audra, our thread is just filled with links from Zillow.com, none of which are the right price.

But it's still fun, right? You're like, "Oh, we could do this with this house and we could do this with this room, and if we had that land—that's that big nice oak tree—we could put a little swing in there." That is not what Abraham's thinking. He is not excited about this. This is not like the great adventure for him. This is economic suicide. This is bringing shame and disappointment to his father. And yet that's exactly what the Lord asked him to do. And it's probably to some degree what the Lord's asking you to do.

If you want to see God use your life in a mighty way, there will often be people, lifestyle habits, comforts, traditions, ways of looking at the world that are holding you back. And

unless you leave what you know, you'll never become what the Lord wants. There's some of you who probably even right now are saying, "I know exactly what it is," because it's a sin in your life. Maybe it's a person with whom you engage in sin. And the Lord says, "I've got great things." He's knocking at the door. "I want to launch you.

"I want to unleash you. I want to send you to do great things." But you're stuck and you'll stay stuck unless you leave what you know. Sometimes you've got to leave what you know to become what God really wants. It's true of us as a church as well. Churches can get stuck doing the same old things, the same old way, and they get lulled to sleep spiritually. And everything's okay. The budget looks fine. Church maybe is even growing numerically, but the church is asleep spiritually. There are places that the Lord wants to take it, but they will never see those places unless they get out, unless they go and leave the security of the present moment.

You got to leave the past in the past, leave yourself in the past, and leave the security of the present, even if there are social, economic, and identity implications. Jesus said in Matthew 10:37, "Anyone who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me." Jesus said in Luke chapter 14, verses 25 and 26, "Unless you hate father, mother, brother, sister, wife and children, even your own life, you can't be my disciple." "Anyone who wants to be my disciple has got to take up his cross daily and follow me"; "renounce all that you have."

That's the cost of discipleship. And so if you were to ask the question, is there anything in my life that's keeping me from being totally obedient and surrendered to do what the Lord wants me to do, what would your answer be? Is there something keeping you from that life of faith, that reward that God wants to bring? And if your answer is yes, and you would say, "But I want to do what God wants, I want to go into that vast unknown. How do I get there?" There's an answer in this passage.

It's in chapter twelve, verses two and three, and it's a series of promises that God makes to Abraham if he will step out in faith and do what the Lord is asking him to do. It's a reminder that even though obedience has some initial cost, the value of God's reward infinitely outweighs the cost of that obedience. And so he says to Abraham, if you'll do this, if you'll get out, leave the comfort of your present, "I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you. I will make your name great.

"You will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you. I will curse anyone who treats you with contempt. And all the peoples on the earth will be blessed through you." Seven different promises are given to Abraham in those two verses. I listened to a message from Steve Lawson several months ago. He listed them under seven headings. I think they're helpful. I'll give them to you. National greatness: "I will make you a great nation." Notice that that's exactly what the tower of Babel people wanted. They wanted to make a name great for themselves.

"Let's build this big tower." And God said, "Nope." Scattered their languages, destroyed that project. But here's Abraham hearing from the Lord. It's not that the Lord's anti-greatness. He's pro-greatness so long as he's the one that makes you great. So reject that kind of self-arrogant or that self-sufficient, arrogant approach to greatness and embrace faith. Because if you'll embrace a life of faith, I will make you great. "I will make you a great nation." He says he gives him personal salvation: "I will bless you." He gives him a revered name: "I will make your name great."

"I will bless those who bless you"—he puts that under channeled blessing. Your life will be a channeled blessing. He talks about extended blessing, number four, or number five, guaranteed cursing. "Those who curse you, I will curse." Number six—and then a promised Messiah as number seven: "All the nations of the earth will be blessed through you." It's also interesting, can you throw that scripture back up there? Number two. I tried to list these out. Notice the repetition of the word "I will," "I will," in verse 3, "I will." The focus is on the Lord.

"Abraham, I'm not asking you to like buck up, buttercup, and get your life together and impress me." He's saying, "I'll do it. All you've got to do is trust me. I will, I will." And the other thing that's repeated over and over again, if you'll go back to number two, "I will bless you. You will be a blessing." Number three: bless, bless, and bless. Five times the Hebrew word for blessing is used. And I just think it's interesting because if you go back and do a little study on the word curse, which is first mentioned in Genesis chapter 3 when man sins against God, you see the word curse used five different times in Genesis chapter 1 to Genesis chapter 11 up to this point.

And it's almost as if the Lord is saying through Moses, "Abraham, if you will just trust me, if you will just step out in faith, it is through you that I will keep the promise. It is through you that I'll reverse the curse. It's through you that you get the land back and the blessing back and the communion back and all of that restoration and reconciliation that you're yearning for. It will all come back if you will just repent and believe." It is through Abraham that God is bringing us back to Eden.

That was his choice. And the amazing thing is Abraham does it. He says, "Okay, Lord," and he takes the step of faith and he goes. Now we're going to see that journey's filled with failure and disappointment and challenges, and that's going to be the fun of the series. We're going to get to walk with Abraham on his life of faith. But the Lord is faithful to keep his promise to Abraham. He gives him a land, he gives him a son, he gives him a nation, eventually through the nation of Israel.

And it is through that nation of Israel that the Messiah comes, our Lord Jesus Christ. And it is through Jesus Christ that we ultimately enjoy these things that were given to Abraham. True greatness is found in him. Personal salvation is found in Jesus Christ. Channel blessing,

guaranteed cursing is found through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The story of Abraham is really the gospel preached beforehand is how Paul talks about it in Galatians chapter three. All of these rewards that are given to Abraham are available to us through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you got your Bible, just real quickly—we don't have much time—in Galatians chapter three, he's talking about Abraham, and he's talking about how Abraham was the founding father of faith, and ends up making the argument that what makes you a Jew, what makes you true Israel is not your biological Jewishness. It's your faith like Abraham had faith. And so he says, "You know then that those who have faith, these are the ones who are Abraham's true sons. The Scripture saw in advance that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and so he proclaimed the gospel ahead of time to Abraham."

Go to the next one. "Saying to Abraham, All the nations will be blessed through you. Consequently, those who have faith are blessed with Abraham, who had faith." He says at the end of verse 29, this is kind of the climax of his argument. "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to—" And so if you're here this morning and you're kind of like, "Well, that's a nice story for Abraham and all; what does that have to do with me?" What God started in Abraham, he fulfilled through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Promises that were given to Abraham are promises that can be given to you and me if we repent of our sin and put our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And when you think about "What do I need to leave behind?"—you leave behind what the Lord Jesus is saying is keeping you from being completely obedient to him. Your sordid past, all of your shame, those things that you think disqualify you, do not disqualify you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ because he qualifies the called. He takes the unqualified and he makes them qualified.

All that's required of you is the same thing that was required of Abraham, repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And you say, "Well, why would I want to do that? It would cost me so much. I would lose my girlfriend. I'd lose my boyfriend. I'd have to change my work. The implications are not worth it." And that's where I think you're not seeing the point. Hebrews chapter eleven, verse six, one of the key verses for this series, is that "without faith it's impossible to please God, because anyone who would come after him would believe that he exists and believe that he rewards those who seek him."

I love this passage because it's a reminder that the reward we're after is not the physical blessings of God. It's not the new house. It's not the obedient children. It's not the enjoyable marriage. The true reward is not the blessings that God gives. It's communion with the God who blesses. And you'll see Abraham over the next few weeks go through mountaintop highs and valley lows, but the one constant is that the God who called him was with him in every moment. And the presence of that God, communion with that God, that is the reward.

That's the reward of faith. And you can have that today. It's not something you have to prove yourself and earn. It's something you can have today as a gift of the Holy Spirit when you repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. And if you're a Christian this morning, that spirit lives in you, but so often we grieve the Holy Spirit because we've shifted from walking by faith to gratifying the desires of the flesh. And we're silencing that joy, deafening that call that God has on us to say, "Come and be part of my counterculture.

"Come and let me use you in a great and wonderful way. I don't need your talent, I don't need your abilities, I don't need your money, I just need your faith." And so this morning as we enter into a time of response, I want to invite you to put your yes on the table. And maybe like Abraham, you'd say, "I don't know what this means. I don't know what the future's going to hold. But I know that the God who's calling me will sustain me and keep me if I'll put my yes on the table."

If there's something you want to pray about, maybe a big decision you're very anxious and nervous about, the altar will be open. I'll be happy to pray with you. If you're here this morning and you're not a Christian, and the Lord would say to you, "Today is the day of salvation. Today's the day where you repent of your sin, recognize you can't save yourself, that I save you through what my Son has done on the cross on your behalf." And if you want to make that decision this morning, you can come forward to the front and publicly say, "I want to give my life to Jesus Christ."

Other ways for you to respond as the Lord leads, you do that now as we pray. Father in heaven, we thank you for this time and your word. We thank you that you're a God who still speaks today, that your word is a living word and it is powerful. And I pray that you would use this time as we repent of sin and exercise faith in what it is that you're calling us to do, that you would give us wisdom to know what that looks like and courage to step out in faith and do it.

And we pray this in Jesus' name.

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1. Transcript note: spoken as "they were Arabic"; the people of Ur in Abram's day were Sumerian- and Akkadian-speaking Mesopotamians, not Arabs. "Sin" is the Akkadian name of the moon god (Sumerian "Nanna"), and Ur was the chief center of his worship. Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Sin (Mesopotamian god)." ↩
2. Transcript note: spoken as "Joshua chapter 24, verse 4"; the statement that Israel's ancestors, including Terah, "lived beyond the Euphrates River and worshiped other gods" is Joshua 24:2. Source: Joshua 24:2 (CSB), BibleGateway. ↩