

## Devotion 2

The call of Abram (soon to be Abraham) is not merely the story of one man's faith and his willingness to follow the Lord. It is the story of how God preserved for himself a people **from** whom and **for** whom the Messiah would come.

To this point in the story of redemption, the line of promise was easily distinguished from the line of the serpent. In one part of God's creation lived Adam and Eve, along with Seth and all their children. This was the line of the promise. In another part of God's creation lived Cain and his children. This was the line of the serpent. Sadly, the line of the promise failed to maintain their identity when they married the daughters of the line of the serpent. This was what what's brought on the flood. After the flood the troubles continued; the people built the tower of Babel. In response, God confused their languages, thereby scattering the people throughout the world. Which was a matter of great concern. With everyone scattered, where then is the line of promise? From whom and for whom would the Messiah come? It is in this context that we read about the call of Abram.

Have you ever wondered why Jesus was born of the family of Abraham? There were other families in the world, some of which were more impressive than that of Abraham's lineage. Surely the Messiah would have been better served had he been born of a prestigious and noble family, would he not? Think only of our respective countries. Canada and the USA are often led by members of dynastic families. So why was Jesus born of such a relatively unknown people?

To understand this, we need to see the place of Abraham, the father of all believers, in God's plan of redemption. You see, Abraham wasn't just another individual, he was something more. The Lord called Abraham to serve as a representative, as someone to stand at the head of a people. This is made abundantly clear in God's call of Abraham.

Listen to the promise that God gave to Abram. "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations." In these words, you hear the breadth of God's plan for Abraham. God's call not only had consequences in Abraham's life, but also for a great number in and through Abraham. Thus, from the first, Abraham stood before the Lord as more than just another person. He stood as the head of a great company of people; a people the Lord would bless. It was **from** this people and **for** this people that the Messiah would come. And all who are "in Christ" are "Abraham's offspring". So the Lord preserved for himself a people. And it is this work of salvation that we are called to trust, which is no easy thing. It isn't for us and it wasn't for Abraham.

You see, God had promised rich blessings to Abraham – including that he would make a great nation of him. There was, however, one problem: Abraham had no sons. This placed a huge question mark behind God's promise for Abraham: How could the Lord fulfill his word to him if Sarah remained barren? Abraham's concern was not simply would he ever enjoy the birth of a son! Abraham's concern was with the Lord's ability to fulfill his word: could he do what he had promised?

So the Lord showed Abram something of his power and glory in the stars of the heavens. As you know, the night sky is filled with evidence of God's power and glory. The point was clear: if God could call all those stars into being, then giving Abram a son was surely not beyond his

ability. In light of this revelation, Abram believed God. Though humanly speaking it seemed impossible, Abram believed!

That's what God's covenant demands of us. He gives us his word, we are called to believe! True, Abraham still didn't have a son. But he had a God who was able to keep his word. We know that even more than Abraham did. We know of the miraculous birth of a greater son in whom we have the gift of life eternal. That we must believe. It's not an option; it's the demand of God's covenant! True, we can't see it, but we must believe it. Faith is the only right response to the Lord's promises.

If you're anything like me, you don't like to wait. Whether it's for a package in the mail or a line up in the grocery store, I'm always trying to get done quicker, on my time-table. In the story before us today, Sarai did not want to wait upon the Lord. And who can blame her? She was well past the years of conceiving; and, knowing the importance of having a son (remember, she knew that God had promised a son to Abraham) Sarai took matters into her own hands.

There was a law that made her plan legally permissible. A child born to a servant girl and Abram could be legally adopted and would become the heir of the family. The law allowed it. And so Sarai sought to use this specific legal custom to help bring about the Lord's promise of a son – something we all are tempted to do to this very day!

When it comes to receiving the promises of God, we are tempted to use to do it ourselves. We go to church, we do good works, we try very hard to please the Lord – in order to gain what he has promised. But this self-righteousness cannot overcome sin. It couldn't overcome Hagar's boasting, or Sarai's angry response. Using the Law does not accomplish what the Lord has promised by his grace. And so we must wait. Fortunately, we wait upon the Lord in the light of Christmas. God keeps his promises. Don't run ahead of him. Wait upon his good pleasure. He is faithful.

When the Lord told Abraham that his 90 year old wife would have a child, Abraham laughed. Was Abraham laughing because this promise was humorous? No, although Sarah would also laugh, and her laughter was disobedient. But not Abraham's. Was Abraham laughing because of how strange this was? No, although it was certainly miraculous. No, Abraham laughed because what he was told by the Lord was so wonderful, so amazing. His was the laughter of joy! The Lord's promise of redemption was coming to pass. Abraham's heart was filled with joy, a joy that expressed itself in laughter.

If Abraham rejoiced at the announcement of Isaac, how much more should we rejoice at the birth of our Lord? Our world laughs at the Christmas Story, thinking it either humorous or strange. But it is neither. It is wonderful and joy-inducing. Christmas is a time for celebrating God's faithfulness and redeeming power. What is impossible with man was sovereignly accomplished by the Lord. Does the birth of our Lord fill us with joy? No eye has seen, no ear has heard what God has prepared for those who love him. We must join Abraham in his joy. As we think about the incarnation, let us rejoice and be glad in it.