

# "The Main Thing"

Genesis 13:4-11, 14-18 and Luke 14:15-24

A Sermon by Dr. Jim Davis

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Legacy: it's what your life leaves behind. And God's hope for you and me is that our lives would leave a legacy behind them that shows that we belonged to Him, that we lived our lives in relationship to Him. The Bible says our lives were created to do that.

But the Bible also says we were created for a role. And when we take up that role, when we pursue a partnership with God in the work God's doing in the world, then our lives stop being trivial. And they become timeless. They leave a legacy.

All this year in worship, we've decided to look at lives like that. Lives lived in partnership with God. Lives that left a legacy behind them. And two weeks ago we began to look at the life of Abram. We started with the first story the Bible tells us about Abram. And we saw God give Abram a gracious invitation, an invitation to "walk across the room," to leave the place he knew and the people he knew and go a country God said he would show Him.

We saw Abram make a decision, to trust God, to accept the invitation and go where God wanted him to go. We saw him walk with God across the land of the Chaldeans to Haran and eventually on to Canaan. And the willingness to take that walk, the Bible says, started to shape Abram's faith. It formed the first part of his legacy.

Then last week Mark Smith helped us look at the second story the Bible tells us about the life of Abram. It's not a flattering story. But the legacy of all our lives includes some chapters we're proud of, and some chapters we're not proud of. And last week, you read about a chapter in Abram's life that I'm sure he wasn't proud of.

It was a chapter where faith was overcome by fear. Abram, the Bible says, was afraid in a famine, he wouldn't be able to feed his family. He was afraid in Egypt, that a powerful man might want Sarai to be his wife. And his fears caused Abram to forget two of the promises God made to Him; the promise to "bless" him, which

meant that God would provide for his needs, and the promise God made to "curse his enemies," which meant that God would protect Him."

And when he forgot God's word to him, God's promises to him, the Abram's partnership with God came apart. He released the faith in God that he had caught as God led him into the land of Canaan. And instead of becoming a blessing to the nations he became a bane to the Egyptians and they threw him out of the country.

Now the reason I've spent some time this morning reviewing the two first two stories we've already told from the life of Abram is simple. Most of us are forgetful.

Have you heard the story of the three forgetful sisters. They lived together and all of them were elderly. One night, the oldest drew a bath. She put one foot in the tub, then paused and shouted out to her sisters. "Was I getting in the tub or out?"

The second sister shouted back, "I don't know, I'll come and see." She started up the stairs, but stopped halfway. She paused a moment, then shouted out, "Was I going up the stairs, or coming down?"

The third sister was sitting in the kitchen at the table listening to her sisters. "Let's hope I never get that forgetful," she said. Then she reached out to knock on the wood of the table for good luck. After she did, she paused a moment. Then she yelled, "I'll come up and help both of you, but first I need to see who's knocking at the door."

We're forgetful people, aren't we? We are. Maybe not as forgetful as the three sisters. But we still have trouble remembering sometimes. We do. That's why we have calendars, isn't it? And our calendars are marked with dates we don't want to forget; anniversaries, birthdays holidays.

And you probably noticed. Abram doesn't have a calendar. But he doesn't want to forget important days in his life either. So in Genesis 12, after he heard God promises to him and his family "Abram" the Bible says, "built an altar to the Lord." He built it to remember. He built it to remember a day in his walk with God he didn't want to forget.

And this morning, when we read Genesis 13, here is Abram, Long after the day the altar was first built, soon after his return from Egypt, where he forgot God's promises, here is Abram, back at the altar. And he's there for a reason. He's there to remember.

And just like Abram, we need to remember too. We need to remember that like Abram, God has given us a gracious invitation. He has invited us into a relationship with Him and into a role alongside Him as partners in Missio Dei the mission of God in our world. Like Abram, we need to remember times in our partnership with God that we're proud of. And we need to remember times when we've forgotten all about our partnership with God and re-commit ourselves to it.

But we forget, don't we? We forget to do that. So this morning here's the first take-away from the third story the Bible tells us about the life of Abram. The take-away is this. Take time to remember. Go home from worship today and mark at least a few days on your calendar for the rest of this year, days that you want to set aside to remember, to remember your relationship with God and re-establish your partnership with Him.

Mark Ash Wednesday. It comes up in just a few weeks. It's a date that's meant to help you remember the day God's Son started to walk toward Jerusalem for you. It's an important date in your partnership with God. So Mark it on your calendar and plan to take time to remember.

Mark Maundy Thursday too. That's when Jesus said it simply to you and to me. "Do this," he said to us, "in remembrance of me." Mark Good Friday. That's when Christ went to the cross to stop sin from breaking apart His partnership with you. Mark Easter Sunday. That's when your Redeemer rose from the dead and made it possible for his partnership with you to last through all eternity.

Mark the dates on your calendar. And on each of the days that you mark, take time to do what Abram did. Take time to go back to a place of worship. Take time to call on the name of the Lord. Take time to reaffirm your relationship with God. Take time to remind yourself of the promises He has made to you.

Take time to tell Him you're ready to partner with Him again. Tell Him when He asks you to "walk across a room" you're ready to do it. Tell Him you want to be part of the Missio Dei, the mission of God in the world. Ask Him to show you how he wants you to go to work.

Then do one more thing. Don't let what happens next in your life distract you. Because there's one thing I can promise you will almost certainly happen. As soon as you tell God you're ready to be part of His mission in the world, something will happen that will distract you. Remember what happened in Abram's life?

" Now Lot, who was moving about with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents," the Bible says. "But the land couldn't support them ... together ... and quarreling arose between Abram's herders and the herders of Lot."

And if you've ever been involved in a family quarrel, a family fight, you know how great a distraction it can be. It can take up your time. It can eat up your energy, emotionally and physically. It can distract you from almost everything else you're doing.

But in Genesis 13, amazingly Abram isn't distracted. Look at what he says, "Let's not have quarreling between you and me," he tells Lot. "Isn't the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left."

And if you ask why does Abram say that? Why does he offer Lot the choice, I think the answer is pretty clearly implied. I think Abram gives Lot first choice because he remembers. He remembers the lesson he learned about God's promise to provide when he went down to Egypt.

Before he went, he thought God couldn't provide for his family. He thought he needed to provide for himself. But when he came back from Egypt Abram knew better. So he went back to the altar. He called on the name of the Lord. He remembered God's promises to him, including His promise to provide for Him and his family.

So now, in the middle of a family quarrel, Abram makes his decision. This time, he'll trust God's promise. Even a family quarrel won't prevent him. He'll keep the main thing in His life, the main thing. He'll remember his partnership with God.

In 1904 a young man graduated from a Chicago high school. But this young man wasn't just any young man. His name was William Whiting Borden, and he was the heir to the Borden Dairy estate. At 18, he was already a millionaire. But he was also a Christian. He had put his faith in Christ after hearing a sermon by Dwight Moody.

For his high school graduation present, his parents gave their son a trip around the world. And as he traveled through Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, Bill felt a growing burden for what he called the people of the world who were poor and hurting. He wrote a letter back to his parents. He told them he'd made a decision

about his future. "I'm going to give my life to prepare to serve God on the mission field," he wrote.

His father was furious. And a family quarrel began. As it did, Bill Borden wrote two words in the back of his Bible: "No reserves." Shortly after he wrote those words he wrote his father and told him he was willing to give up his family fortune, if necessary, to accept God's invitation to him to walk across the world and be a part of the mission of God in China.

His father wrote back. He told his son if he went down this road, he wouldn't take away his fortune, but he would never allow him to work in the family business again. Shortly after he received that letter from his Father, Bill wrote in the back of his Bible two more words, "No retreat."

Then he went on to college. He studied at Yale. While he was there he led a morning Bible study and prayer group. He shared his faith in Christ with students all around him in his classes. His morning Bible study and prayer group grew each year he was at Yale, until it included more than half the students on campus.

After graduation Borden went on to seminary and then to Egypt. He wanted to learn Arabic because he felt God calling him to live and work among the Muslims of Kantu province in China. But in his first year in Egypt, he contracted spinal meningitis and within a few weeks he was dead, at age 25.

After his death, his personal effects, along with his Bible, were sent back to his parents in Chicago. When his parents opened the Bible that had belonged to their son, they found the words he had written earlier in his life, "No reserves" and "No retreat." Then, just below those words they read these, words written and dated just days before Bill Borden's death. The words they read were "No regrets."

You know, I think Abram would have understood those words. I think Jesus would have too. For when we accept God's invitation to walk with Him through life, and work with Him through life. When we receive His invitation to be part of His kingdom work in our world and don't let distractions get in our way, we discover the truth. That no-one has ever regretted the decision to live a life of partnership with God.

Let's pray ...