

***Go Back to the Cross***  
***Gen 12:10-13:4, April 28<sup>th</sup> 2024***

One of the sweet challenges of being daddy to little girls is agreeing upon a family movie. A man can only watch Snow White so many times. Dads needs some action. Which is why one of my favorite children's movie is the Lion King. It's the story of a little lion prince named Simba who, after his father is killed, runs in fear to the jungle where he was adopted by a snarky meerkat and... effervescent warthog. In the jungle Simba grows up, but he also grows selfish & lazy. So, when he learns that his kingdom is suffering under the tyranny of his murderous uncle Scar, he refuses to fight back and claim his throne, until he suffers a baboon-induced existential crisis and remembers who he is. He then returned home, defeated evil, established justice, and took his rightful place as king. Good stuff! *Most of you know the story but do you know where Disney found the story?* Not in some ancient African tome, but in the Bible. According to the film's producer, the Lion King was inspired by the lives of the prodigal patriarchs of the OT.

Like Simba, our text this evening finds Abram abandoning his home in fear and running away to a distant land where he fell into sin. But after a Pharaoh-induced existential crisis, he remembered who and whose he was and returned home broken by his sin but better. Tonight, we consider the true story of a runaway patriarch, remembering and returning to God.

Last week we began our study of the life of Abram, the Shemite, whom God called from Ur of the Chaldeans to the land that the Lord would show him. So, flying blind, Abram and his household went: traveling 600m NW to Haran where his father died. From Haran, Abram took his household 400m S into Canaan, to a place called Bethel where he built an altar & called upon the name of the Lord. Tonight, I'll show you that ***Christians must walk by faith and not by fear.***

The first thing we see is a ***flight of fear.*** (v10) There was a severe famine in the land. Maybe the rains never came. Maybe a blight decimated the harvest. Any way you slice it, there was nothing to slice... no food to sustain Abram and his household. Now, a famine was serious business. Abram couldn't just drive over to Publix and fill the trunk with goodies. A famine meant death. If putting a baby in a barren womb is one of God's choicest miracles, famines are one of His choicest crucibles in which He tested his people of old. A famine in the land drove Isaac to Gerar (Gen26) where he tragically repeated his father's folly. A famine in the land drove Joseph's brother's down to Egypt in search of food (Gen42). A famine in the land drove Elimelech and Naomi out of the Promised Land into the plains of Moab where they met Ruth.

Now Abram found himself caught between his the rock of God's covenant and the hard place of his circumstances. *Hadn't God just promised to bless Abram & make of him a great nation? Hadn't he promised to Abram that his offspring would possess the land of Canaan?* Yes. But Abram was struggling to believe those promises as he stared down the deadly double barrels of a famine. He doubted God's promise of provision. So, he took matters into his own hands and went down to Egypt, the breadbasket of the ancient world. And there it is: the chink in Abram's armor, his pet sin, the thorn in his flesh that will plague him throughout his life. Abram, the friend of God and father of the faithful, was a fearful man. And his fear drove him to doubt. And doubt drove him to sin.

*Maybe you can relate?* Maybe you're caught in the same place tonight. Your life has taken a surprising turn and you find yourself on a path you never expected to walk. And it hurts. And you're afraid. You have a choice to make: will you cling to the promises of God, striving to take each step to his honor as you wait upon Him ***or*** will you give into fear, lean on your own understanding, go your own way, be your own god? Don't make Abram's mistake. Don't go down to Egypt. Abide in Christ and in his promises. Cry out to Him who walks upon the waters;

Him whose voice commands the winds and waves of your trial: *Have thine own way, Lord! Have thine own way! Thou art the Potter; I am the clay. Mold me & make me after thy will, While I am waiting, yielded & still.*

But Abram didn't do that. Instead, he doubted God's promise of provision & he left the place of God's choosing for land of his choosing. And as Abram & Co. approached Egypt, he realized something: he realized that his wife Sarai was awfully pretty... pretty enough to get him killed. **v11-12**. The great thing is that Sarai was at least 65! And my older sisters say, "amen."

I remember as a boy, sitting with my Grandad at the breakfast table when I noticed him staring at Gramma across the kitchen. He was transfixed. Delighted by the beauty of the bride of his youth... even after all these years. Without taking his eyes off her he said to me in a hushed tone, "Jimmy, do what I did and marry a beautiful woman." When I looked, I saw an old woman in an apron and orthopedic shoes, hunched over the sink. But when he looked saw perfection.

*Brother, when was the last time you told your bride that she was beautiful? Don't say it if you don't believe it. But if you don't believe it, the problem probably isn't her body but your heart. She may be in the flower of her youth; her body may bear the proud badges of motherhood; her crown of blond, black, or brown may have silvered and frosted with age; her face once smooth may have become delicately creased by the years of the life you've shared and built together. No matter the shape of her body or the stage of her life, your bride is to be your standard of beauty to whom you can always say: **SoS 4:7-You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you...** Brothers, we must remember that the uncherished wife will wilt faster than the unwatered flower. And that comparison is the thief of joy. **Prov5:18-19** "Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe."*

While Abram may have had an accurate assessment of Sarai's physical beauty he failed to cherish her as a gift from God. He saw her loveliness only as a liability. You see, sojourners had no legal status or protection. They were at the mercy of their hosts. And if the Egyptians wanted to take Sarai and kill Abram they could. And just then, a new doubt gripped Abram's heart and filled him with fear- He doubted God's promise of protection given back in 12:3.

So, once again, Abram goes his own way. His fear gave way to doubt, which gave way to sin (**13-16**). *Now-Abram's scheme isn't a complete lie is it?* We learn in Gen20 that Sarai is his ½ sister (same father-it was a pagan wedding). *But children, what do we call a half-truth? A whole-lie. Do you smell the rotting selfishness of Abram's plan? If you were Sarai, what would you think? "What about me? Do I mean so little to you? Won't you fight for me?"* Maybe she protested. Maybe she didn't. Regardless, upon entering Egypt, they execute Abram's plan.

And as it turns out Abram was right. His 65-year old bombshell of a wife was immediately noticed... but not just by Joe-Shmo Egyptian. She caught the royal eyes of Pharoah's sons, the princes of Egypt, who gave her such rave reviews to their father, he ordered her to be added to his harem-collection of human dolls. While Sarai suffered, Abram was showered with riches until he became (**13:2**) "heavy with wealth."

*How much greater is our Lord Jesus Christ? Against the backdrop of Abram's betrayal of his bride; the perfect love of Jesus for his bride shines with heavenly brilliance, does it not? Abram willing sacrificed Sarai's life to save his own, but on the cross Jesus willing laid down his own life in exchange for hers. Abram surrendered Sarai to the brutality of lust, but Jesus surrendered himself to the murderous scorn of sinners and volcanic wrath of God that his bride might be forgiven, freed, and cleansed: "From heaven he came and sought her to be his holy bride. With his own blood, he bought her and for her life he died."* Abram's wickedness brought him wealth, but Jesus, "though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his

poverty might become rich.” *Friend, do you know the perfect love of Jesus? Doesn't your heart ache for it? Ache no more! "Come ye sinners, poor & needy, weak & wounded sick & sore, Jesus ready stands to save you, full of pity, love, and power. Let not conscience make you linger, nor of fitness fondly dream; all the fitness He requireth is to feel your need of Him."*

Despite Abram's best efforts to derail his life the Lord keeps his promises: he **provides** for Abram, even if it's from the treasury of Pharaoh, and he **protects** Abram, even if Abram threw his wife away, God fought for her by afflicting Pharaoh's house with great plagues. When Pharaoh realized, what Abram had done to him, he rebuked him and sent him away. *Do the movements of this story sound familiar? The bride leaves Canaan and is enslaved by Pharaoh in Egypt. So the Lord sends plagues upon Pharaoh's house until he lets her go, showering her with Egyptian gold before journeying back to the Promised Land?* Gen12 is a preview of the greater Exodus to come! But there's something more...God not Abram was in control of Abram's life. While Abram's sin was his choice and wholly his responsibility, God is greater than his sin! And that is very good news for you & for me: sinners saved by the same sovereign God whose plan for your life is so perfect he can and does superintend your sins, failures, weaknesses, and mistakes to bring about his holy ends in and through your life.

*Where do sinful failures go when their sin has found them out? When they're exposed & ashamed? When they're disgusted by themselves & the mess they've made of their own lives? When they've hurt or betrayed those entrusted to their care?* They go back to the cross. **(Gen13:1-4) DRD-** "It as if the geography reflects repentance." As Abram had gone down to Egypt in fear he now went up from Egypt in faith retracing his steps until he was standing in front of the altar which he had built at the first. To put it in New Testament terminology, Abram went back to the cross and called upon the name of the Lord, again.

Some of you may be in Egypt tonight. You've wandered far from God and forgotten who and whose you are. You've fallen and become ensnared in some sin. You feel haunted by a sense of inescapable guilt; powerless to change; utterly unworthy of love & forgiveness; wondering *How did I ever get here? And how can I ever get out? How can a holy God ever forgive me and love me? Tell me what to do! Tell me where to go!*

Do what Abram did. And go where Abram went. Repent and return to the cross, where a fountain of blood was drawn from Immanuel's veins that sinners plunged beneath that flood would lose all their guilty stains. Go back to the cross and there you'll find the Lord waiting w/ arms wide open: like the father waiting for his prodigal son to come home from the far country and from his sin. "& he arose & came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him & felt compassion, & ran & embraced & and kissed him" Lk 15:20 That parable is in the Bible so that you and I would never be too scared or too ashamed to turn around, forsake our sin and run home to our Father in repentance... knowing that his blood can make the foulest clean, his blood availed for me." To you who've wandered down to Egypt, to you who are wallowing in the misery of your sin tonight, you need not stay there. Turn around. Forsake your sin in holy hatred and run home. Come back to the cross on which all your sins were paid for in the blood of Christ. Come home. Our Heavenly Father loves prodigals. And he is waiting. His heart bursting with love for you. His arms opened wide for you. To remain in your sin is to choose death. But to run home is to choose life, life, everlasting life with Jesus.