

"HE BEGAN A GOOD WORK IN YOU"

Genesis 12:1-4 Philippians 1:1-6

The Bible is filled with story after story where we see people victorious, successful and blessed and also where we see people fall on their faces, mess up royally and either push through or fold. The Bible is filled with ordinary people who appear larger than life and do great things for others and for God, and people who struggle and fail. The Bible is full of saints and sinners, and people who are both. The Bible is filled with life's lessons that we can all learn from, try to emulate and pattern our lives after or say definitively this is not how to live or act or behave.

Abram, who later became known as Abraham, is a Biblical character who we need to focus on and learn from. Was Abram a pillar of the faith? Yes, just read in the New Testament Hebrews 11:8-12 and you can find his name in the "Roll Call of Heroes and Heroines of Faith." Did Abram have his shortcomings? You bet, I mean he tried to pass off his wife, Sarah, as his sister.

And in Genesis 20 we read how King Abimelech sent for Sarah and only God coming to the king in a dream intervenes before Abimelech takes this other man's wife. So Abram had his moments but, nevertheless, he was the one chosen by God to bless, and through him, God would bless all the families of the earth.

When we read the first few verses of Genesis 12, verses 1-3 to be exact, did you count how many times the Lord says to Abram those two significant words, "**I Will**"? Not once, not twice, not three, not four but five times the Lord says to Abram, "I Will"- I will show, I will make, I will bless, I will bless, and I will curse. The Lord, making these promises to Abram, introduces to him promises of eternal consequence, worldwide scope, and monumental importance.

Abram is one of the heroes of the faith and yet there is always a danger of looking at such types of people and separating what they did from what God might be asking His children to do today.

This kind of recognition of the extraordinary is too often thought of as the peculiar actions of, oh; let's say missionaries who take those steps of faith into the great unknowns. Missionaries can do it, but can we? And yet all, all of God's children are expected to walk by faith. Martin Luther King once said, "Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase." And that walk by faith will, it will put people in situations and circumstances that will challenge them, stretch them, and yes, cause them to question and wonder.

Abram is called out by the Lord to leave the comforts of what he has always known, he is being called to a different place, to begin something new, to do something new based on faith; faith. Abram would set out from Haran at the age of 75.

Do we think Abram was sitting around hoping and praying that the God that created him would call him, challenge him to do something out of the ordinary? And at 75?

Do we think that Abram, if given the choice would have opted to stay in the comfort of his situation and not do something totally new and foreign?

Abram probably didn't want such a challenge but God gave it. Abram probably would have opted to stay right where he was, but he didn't. And no matter what Abram did- whether it was stay or leave he was going to be a changed man all because of this experience with God. He would never be the same person he was prior to this experience with God because it forced him to think and rethink, it forced him to deal with his own feelings, his wants, his dreams and desires. It made him look in the mirror of life and question, debate, play the "what-ifs" and if we do this what could happen and if we do that what could happen. Challenges and changes have a funny way of doing this to a person or to people.

Never in my wildest dreams did I ever expect to be sitting on the edge, with this congregation; being asked to make a decision the likes of which is set before us after the service today.

The journey over the past several months has been a joyful and painful one for me. There have been times I wanted to get on the boat that good old Jonah got on and head off to Ninevah, all by myself, but I knew in my heart-of-hearts I couldn't, I wouldn't. There were times I thought, "If I was only 65... but I am far from retirement. And I know many of you have been struggling right along with me ever since last October.

This congregation is being asked to do something MONUMENTAL. The congregation is being asked to set forth on a new path, one we have never traveled before. Do we have all the questions answered in this recommendation? Absolutely not. Is there a lot more work to be done if you receive the recommendation? Absolutely. The same is true if you do not receive the recommendation. Friends, this was and is painful work, this was and will be hard work. If I had totaled the number of sleepless hours I have had over the past several months, I just might make an insomniac's nights tame. It was difficult just getting us to the point of making the

decision that the Session is placing before you today. Wilfred A. Peterson once said, "Decision is the spark that ignites action. Until a decision is made nothing happens." Well, something very likely will happen today and we cannot look back, only forward.

If you were with us last Sunday I said that there are a host of emotions and feelings being felt by the people of this church- sad, mad, glad, excited, scared, open, hopeful. As I said to someone the other day, this is new uncharted waters for us. But as I mentioned earlier in reference to Abram, all God's children are expected to walk by faith no matter what the situation or circumstance, no matter what the obstacle or challenge. And, as we read last week in Philippians 1:27-30, we are to, as verse 27 suggests stand, "firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel."

This morning we have gone back into chapter one of Philippians to look at what Paul is saying to the church at Philippi and we quickly find a theme developing, that theme is **Partnership**, in particular, **Partnership in the Gospel**. But what does this partnership entail? What are some of the components that go into this partnership?

First, **there is privilege**. The privilege that is ours is very clearly stated in the first two verses and the three pivotal references to Jesus Christ. There in verse 1, Paul says we are IN Christ; and this is the state of our being: "saints in Christ Jesus." There is the concept of relationship and the relationship is one of servant: "servants of Christ Jesus." And then there are blessings from Christ, and God our Father, which are ours to receive: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." The New English Bible puts it this way- "To all those of God's people, incorporate in Christ Jesus." We are a part of something so much bigger, the community of faith.

And this is a privilege that is indescribable because we have a status in our relationship to God. We are forgiven, we are accepted, we have a new life in Christ and we are a part of a new community- the community of faith.

Friends, the Gospel is something that is universal, for the gift of God of Himself in Jesus Christ is offered to all, to the world. And yet the privilege is only to some, to those who by faith belong to Jesus Christ. Folks, we are a part of those called in Philippians 1:1, "the saints in Christ Jesus."

There are **three aspects to this privilege that is ours as participants in the Gospel of Christ: 1) a new standing in our relationship to God; 2) a new life; and 3) a new community.**

But there is a second point I want to make today and that is **there is a promise**. That promise is found in verse 6 where Paul says, "I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ." Just as Paul, in verse 3 of chapter 1 gives thanks to God, he now comes full circle in verse 6 to look

beyond the Philippians and himself to the God whose own "good work" the church is, including both Paul and the Philippians. And so what Paul is saying is that the one who started the work of grace in Philippi will not abandon it in a state of incompleteness. He is saying that God will complete, finish, bring to fulfillment, perfect that work "at the day of Christ Jesus." (*Interpretation, Philippians*, Craddock, p. 17)

Friends, God began something special way back on December 15, 1831, some 178 years ago when this church was founded and he is not finished with us yet. The one who began a good work among us and who has sustained and kept this church together all these years will bring us, this church, to completion. Because our God is faithful and is going to complete what He started with us, we can move forward in service and mission as we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ, the great Head of the Church. We can boldly march forward "to perfection" because of what God has done for us in sending Christ to die for us. Why can we do this?

All because our God began a good work among us that will, that will, one day be brought to completion. What a great God we worship; what a great God we serve. And the Lord said to Abram, "I will." Amen.

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Introduction: The Bible is filled with story after story where we see...

Abram, later known as Abraham, is a Bible character that we need to look at and learn from

Was he a pillar of the faith? Read Hebrews 11:8-12

Did Abram have shortcomings?

Abram was chosen by God to bless and through him God would bless all the families of the earth

Genesis 12:1-3

Two significant words- "I _____"

Abram is called out by the Lord ... to begin something new based on faith

The congregation is being asked to do something MONUMENTAL

Philippians 1: the theme is Partnership in the Gospel- what are some of the components that go into this partnership?

First, **there is** _____

Three aspects to this that is ours as participants in the Gospel of Christ:

1. A new _____ in our relationship to God
2. A new _____
3. A new _____

Second, **there is a** _____ vs. 6

"The one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion...."

Conclusion: And the Lord said to Abram, "I will."