

GENESIS 11:27 - 12:8

Introduction

"Every disciple is a believer but not every believer is a disciple."

Pastor and evangelist Greg Laurie makes that statement in his wonderful book, Discipleship: Giving God Your Best. Greg is trying to convey the failure of many born-again believers to whole-heartedly pursue Jesus Christ. They are genuinely saved but they are reluctant to become committed disciples.

Is it possible to be a believer but be a reluctant disciple? I'd have to answer "Yes." In our text this morning we encounter two such individuals:

^ Abraham's nephew, Lot, is an example of a genuine believer who was reluctant throughout his lifetime to commit to discipleship. We will learn more about Lot in subsequent weeks. Lot's testimony was of little value to either his own family or his in-laws; he offered his two virgin daughters to the men of Sodom in order to spare his two guests; he was hesitant to leave Sodom. Yet the Bible declares, in 2Peter 2:7, that Lot was a righteous person; Lot was *saved!* He was a genuine believer who never discovered the delights of discipleship. The New Testament tells us that he was a "...righteous man, dwelling among them, [who] tormented *his* righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing *their* lawless deeds..." (2 Pet 2:8).

%o More surprisingly, Abraham himself is presented here as an example of a genuine believer who was reluctant to commit to discipleship! God's call of Abraham is summarized by Stephen in his speech before the Sanhedrin in Acts 7:2-3

And he said, Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said to him, Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.

According to Stephen, Abraham was saved and received God's call to discipleship while in Mesopotamia, in Ur of the Chaldeas, *before* he moved with his father Terah to Haran. Then he delayed in Haran for five years until Terah died before committing himself to fully obeying God's call. Either the call of God in Ur was repeated in Haran, after Terah's death, or there was only one call in Ur and Chapter Twelve refers back to it. In any case, Abraham delayed fully following God in discipleship.

Genesis Twelve is remarkable for many reasons:

w Prophetically, it establishes God's dealings with the nation of Israel as a specially chosen nation to be the recipient of a land and promises which continue even today to be fulfilled!

w Personally, it encourages *you* to discipleship as God's saints.

- #1 The Dangers Of Delaying Your Discipleship
(11:27-32)
- #2 Discover The Delights Of Your Discipleship
(12:1-8)

#1 The Dangers Of Delaying Your Discipleship
(11:27-32)

Abraham was saved the same way you and I are saved, the same way men and women and children have always been and will always be saved: By grace through faith. James 2:23 says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." He was saved and then instructed: "Now the LORD had said to Abram: Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you" (Genesis 12:1). As was pointed out, this call and command was given to Abraham in Ur; verse one of chapter twelve further establishes this by the verb tense the translators chose, "now the Lord had said to Abram..."

Abraham was a believer, but he clearly delayed in his discipleship.

Genesis 11:27 This *is* the genealogy of Terah: Terah begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Haran begot Lot.

Genesis 11:28 And Haran died before his father Terah in his native land, in Ur of the Chaldeans.

Genesis 11:29 Then Abram and Nahor took wives: the name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and the father of Iscah.

Genesis 11:30 But Sarai was barren; she had no child.

We find out here that Lot was Abraham's brothers' son - Abraham's nephew. Perhaps, when Haran died, Abraham became a guardian to Lot. The marriage of Abraham's brother Nahor is mentioned because he became the grandfather of Laban and Rebekkah, both of whom would later figure prominently in the story of Abraham's grandson, Jacob.

Genesis 11:31 And Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot, the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram's wife, and they went out with them from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan; and they came to Haran and dwelt there.

Genesis 11:32 So the days of Terah were two hundred and five years, and Terah died in Haran.

It was in Ur, remember, that God appeared to Abraham. The departure of the family from Ur for Canaan was in response to that call upon Abraham's life. They only got as far as Haran, though, then settled down there. For five years, until Terah died, Abraham delayed.

Abraham's decision to delay in Haran reminds you of the man in Matthew 8:21-22

Then another of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

Notice that this man is called a "disciple," but he wishes to delay his discipleship. This disciple wants to "go and bury [his] father." Jesus' answer seems harsh until you understand the circumstances. The man's father *wasn't dead!* He was asking Jesus if he could delay following him in discipleship *until* his elderly parents passed away and were buried. This was a common expression in the Jewish culture to communicate that the son felt he had a responsibility and a reason to stay with his parents. The responsibility was to honor his parents; the reason was so he wouldn't forfeit his inheritance! Leaving his family to follow Jesus would cut him off from receiving any inheritance at the death of his father.

Jesus' answer, "Let the dead bury their own dead," means, "Let those who are *spiritually* dead remain behind to bury those who are *physically* dead." His answer reminds this disciple of the eternal life that Jesus imparts and it calls him to a life of discipleship. In Luke's account of this same incident you read, "Jesus said to him, Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:60). Spiritual life is superior to the responsibilities and reasons you might offer as excuses to delay - the spiritual life you can be used to bring to others by sharing your part of preaching the Gospel.

We don't know what happened to this disciple; his decision is not recorded for us. It should be clear enough, however, that believers often offer excuses to delay

discipleship. The responsibility may be noble, as perhaps it was in this case, to honor parents; the reason may be carnal, as perhaps it was in this case, to receive the inheritance. For whatever responsibility or reason, such delays are dangerous for at least two reasons:

^ Delays are dangerous because your old life is a place of death.

Ur of the Chaldeas was Abraham's native land. It was a place of idolatry and moon worship. Terah himself is called an idolater in Joshua 24:2. It was a place of death; Haran died there, before his father, before his son. Abraham should have realized, after he was saved, that delays would be dangerous in such a place. God had shown him first hand that the best Ur could offer was death.

You live in a place very like Ur of the Chaldeas! As you saw last week, the whole world is "Babylon" to you as you journey toward your heavenly home in New Jerusalem. Once you are saved, the best that this world can offer you is decay and death.

If you are not saved...Take note of Haran! Get out of Ur before death overtakes you.

% Delays are dangerous because they cause spiritual drought.

The name "Haran" means "parched." The city had apparently been named after Abraham's brother. While it was a prosperous seaport and trade center, it was a place of spiritual drought. God had appeared to Abraham and called him in Ur, telling him to go to Canaan, but Abraham delayed in Haran. For five years Abraham received no further word from the Lord; five long years of spiritual drought!

Abraham couldn't let go of his family. God had distinctly said, "Get out of your country, From your family and from your father's house, To a land that I will show you." Whatever his reasons, Abraham evidently persuaded his father Terah to accompany him to this land that he would be shown. He had been told to leave his father and the extended family behind. Instead he either convinced them to come along, or he compromised and let them come along, and ended up spiritually parched.

The name "Terah" means "delay!" Abraham was delayed and in a drought because he would not separate himself from his father and his extended family.

You have "Terah's" in your life. It might be family...But it could be anything that you refuse or are reluctant to separate yourself from in order to fully follow Jesus in discipleship. The rich young ruler, for example, in Matthew 19 went away from Jesus because he had great possessions and refused to part with them. Every "Terah" leads to a "Haran."

Don't delay your discipleship! We've said that "every disciple is a believer but not every believer is a disciple." Many Christian teachers say that every Christian is by definition a disciple and that you cannot be truly saved unless you are fully committed to following Jesus Christ. While Jesus expects and encourages a strict commitment to discipleship it doesn't always happen in the lives of all believers. Charles Ryrie says "disciples come in all shapes and spiritual conditions."¹ In his book, So Great Salvation, he gives several examples of genuine, saved believers who were nevertheless deficient in some minor or even major way as disciples. Discipleship seems to be a decision you discover or delay in your walk with the Lord.

Have you made that decision? Jesus said, "Follow Me" (Mark 2:14). The phrase "follow Me" can better be translated "follow with Me."² As Jesus' disciple you are to walk with Him in a consistent, ongoing manner. As you do, He will walk with you to produce certain changes:

w You will bear fruit

John 15:8 "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples."

w You will study and obey God's Word

John 8:31 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed."

w You will love one another

John 13:35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

Lot delayed his discipleship and lived a lifetime "oppressed" and "tormented." Abraham delayed his discipleship and was surrounded by death, steeped in spiritual drought for five long years.

Don't delay *your* discipleship. Instead...

¹So Great Salvation, p. 104

²Greg Laurie, Discipleship: Giving God Your Best, p. 11

#2 Discover The Delights Of Your Discipleship (12:1-8)

These verses are more than devotional. They establish God's dealings with mankind through a chosen nation, promise that nation a land for all time, and establish God's "foreign policy" throughout history. The promises made to and through Abraham, beginning here, affect our world today and set the stage for the fulfillment of many unconditional promises to Israel in the immediate future. In a sense, everything that has preceded these verses in Genesis One through Eleven is a preface or an introduction. Two thousand years of human history, from creation to the flood to the Tower of Babel, are covered in just eleven chapters. The next four hundred years, from Abraham to Joseph, will occupy the next *thirty nine* chapters!

Genesis 12:1 Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you.

God doesn't tell him that He is going to *give* him the land at this point; only that He will *show* it to him! Abraham's discipleship required him to separate from family and familiarity to walk by faith.

You are to walk by faith, separating from family and familiarity, on your way to a land you've seen only on the pages of Scripture. Heaven and your eternal home there is a delight you are constantly discovering.

Genesis 12:2 I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing.

Genesis 12:3 I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Through Abraham would come Jesus, the Savior of the world - through Whom "all the families of the earth shall be blessed." This Messianic prophecy looks forward beyond even our own day to the Second Coming of Jesus to establish His Kingdom on earth. Jerusalem will be His capitol; all the nations of the earth will literally be blessed!

You discover the delight of being God's blessing to others as you are His disciple.

Genesis 12:4 So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram *was* seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

The Lord is so gracious toward Abraham! The text says, "So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him." It omits mentioning that the Lord had spoken at least five years earlier; it omits Abraham's delay. It marks instead a new beginning - even though the command itself was old.

You can have a new beginning in your discipleship!

Genesis 12:5 Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan.

God gave Abraham a ministry to his wife, his nephew, and to those they had acquired in Haran. Even though Abraham's obedience had been immature, God was able to use him.

That should greatly encourage you and I! God is able to use you even while He is conforming you into the image of Jesus, even while He is performing in you the good work He began in Jesus at your conversion.

Genesis 12:6 Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites *were* then in the land.

Genesis 12:7 Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

Genesis 12:8 And he moved from there to the mountain east of Bethel, and he pitched his tent *with* Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; there he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.

Once in the land, Abraham established a witness right at the place of idolatry - the terebinth tree of Moreh. God gave him a witness among the unsaved.

You can know the joy of being a witness to the unsaved.

Once in the land, Abraham discovered the supreme joy of his discipleship: Worship from a pure heart while walking in the will of God and while doing the work of God. "He built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD."

Jesus said many difficult things about discipleship:

Luke 9:23 Then He said to *them* all, If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.

Luke 14:25-26 Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.

Luke 9:62 But Jesus said to him, No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

The difficulties are real, but they are canceled out by the delights you will discover as His disciple.

Conclusion

Abraham "pitched his tent *with* Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; there he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD."

Ai means "heap of ruin"; Bethel means "house of God."³ Abraham worshipped God inbetween Ai and Bethel, inbetween the heap of ruin and the house of God.

You are "inbetween." The world is a heap of ruin; you are headed for heaven, the house of God. You work and you worship between these two worlds as you wait for Jesus to return. Two things should characterize your life as a disciple: Tents and Altars.

^ Tents

Tents speak of your separation from the world and of setting your affections on things to come.

%o Altars

An altar was a place of worship. I said "was" because Jesus has abolished the need for places and structures and symbols of worship. They were all "shadows" of the "substance" of His life, death, bodily resurrection from the grave, and ascension into heaven. The "altar" is anywhere you are:

Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service.

Delays are dangerous. Discover, or *rediscover*, the delights of discipleship!

³A.W. Pink, Gleanings From Genesis