

“Abraham” Matthew 1:1 Steve Harden 12/6/20

Alright, if you will, turn with me to Matthew 1. Our Advent theme this year is “From Ruin to Redemption” as you’ve heard in the video put out by Daniel. Thank you, Daniel, that was wonderful, and Mike announced that. I appreciate it! We chose that because 2020 has obviously been a year of refinement. The Lord has been refining us both as individuals and as a church. It has been difficult in many ways, yet, as we come to this Christmas season we come with great hope. Now is not the time for despair. Now is the time for eager anticipation for what the future has to bring for us as individuals and as a body here. We look forward to those days with great eagerness. He is writing our story! We’ve come to this new chapter in our life as a church, as Shane will be coming on here in January. We are looking forward to our life together, and we’re reminded that we’re just a little part in His great and grand story of redemption. The story of the Bible is a story that again and again takes us from ruin to redemption. It takes hopeless situations, circumstances full of pain, and God somehow orchestrates redemption from the ashes of ruin. So, we decided to highlight just a few of the stories that show this ruin becoming redemption from the genealogy of Jesus, from His ancestors, here this Christmas season. We all know the stories and we’re going to highlight a few of them with this ruin to redemption theme. Now, last week we looked at Adam’s story, the great story from ruin to redemption, from Adam to the second Adam, being Christ.

Today, we look at the story of Abraham, one of my favorite characters in the Old Testament. Abraham’s story is one of grief and of hopelessness that turns into a story of joy, of promises fulfilled, a true ruin to redemption story. And so, this story is found all throughout the scriptures, but we’re going to read just one verse at the beginning of this message, Matthew 1:1. Matthew starts this genealogy in his gospel with Abraham. He says, “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David the son of Abraham.” In the Scriptures, Abraham is held up as an example of a man who received the promises of God, even through great difficulties and trials. He continued to believe the promises of God even though he saw no physical evidence that they were coming true. He is a paradigm of trust and steadfast endurance. Now, he wasn’t perfect by any stretch of the imagination, nor was his faith perfect, but the overarching theme of his life, one of his chief characteristics was that he trusted God in the midst of difficult days, and he took him at His word. He believed the promises of God, and so my purpose tonight is to highlight Abraham’s trust in God when things looked hopeless, so that you and I might draw hope as well when things are looking bad for us and difficult for us, that we can find hope in the promises of God. The promises of God and the covenant of Abraham were threefold. God promised Abraham a land, He promised Abraham descendants without number, and He promised him a seed that would become the Redeemer that would be a blessing for the whole world. So, we’re going to look at these three promises.

First of all, God promised Abraham a land that he would possess. In Genesis 15:18, it says, “On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates.” And Abraham believed God when He told him that his descendants would possess the land. He believed God for what he could not see with his eyes or even imagine in his mind. His journey to the fulfillment of the promise got off to a rather strange start. You see, Abraham was a citizen of Ur. This part of the story is told in Joshua 24. But it points out that Abraham was a pagan and an idolater. We don’t know that he was in any way seeking God, the one true God, but God called to him and brought

him out of Ur. We don't know that he was looking for him at all! But God called him out of his paganism and into a relationship with Himself.

Steven in the book of Acts, when he was making that great sermon before the Sanhedrin in Acts 7, spoke about Abraham and he said this, “²Brothers and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, ³ and said to him, ‘Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you.’” Now, that command is rather clear but it's rather vague as well! God said, ‘Leave,’ and so, Abraham, a man of wealth and of means packed up his bags and took his whole family with him! He obeyed even though he didn't know where he was going! And that would be a pattern in Abraham's life. He obeyed, even when he didn't understand what was going on. He didn't try to demand an explanation from God, ‘Okay, well you tell me what's going on, and then I'll obey you!’ That's just not how it works. He obeyed. Abraham, then Abram, lived out his life as a wanderer living in tents. He would eventually live in the land that God would give to him, the land that God had promised him, but he was always an alien there, always a stranger. A small burial plot was the only land that he ever owned in Canaan. Furthermore, his son, Isaac, never owned any land in Canaan. Jacob, his grandson, never owned any land. And if you'll remember the story, Jacob, during a famine, followed his son, Joseph, down into Egypt where his people, his family, would grow and prosper, becoming slaves, for 400 years! And then Moses would lead them out and eventually they would get back to the land of Canaan and God's promise would be fulfilled. God's promise was fulfilled about 500 years after He promised Abraham. ‘You'll own this.’ Difficult days for Abraham! He didn't see God's promise fulfilled in his lifetime, yet he still trusted Him and believed that God's word was true.

The second promise that we see that God gave to Abraham was His promise of numerous descendants. In Genesis 13 we read this, “¹⁴The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, “Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, ¹⁵ for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. ¹⁶ I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. ¹⁷ Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you.” Did you hear in there that He said, ‘Your offspring will be as the dust of the earth’? God promised Abraham and Sarah that they would be parents of many offspring! As numerous as the dust of the earth or the stars in the sky. Quite a promise! The only problem was that they couldn't have kids! They had tried for so long and they couldn't have any children.

Now let me give you a little bit of a timeline of Abraham's life, okay? When Abraham left Ur, he went to Haran, and there he tarried several years until his dad died, and then he moved on into Canaan. When he left Haran he was about 75 years old, and his wife, Sarah, was 65 years old. You might say they were a little old for children, even then. It was at that time that God made His promise to Abraham that He would give them a son: 75, 65. Now, ten years later after Abraham had battled four kings, he was probably pretty tired. I would think you would be tired if you were 75 years old and you had just won a battle, right? Maybe he felt like he needed to remind God something about what He had promised him so many years ago. I can see him saying, ‘You know, God, I've been waiting about ten years for kids. In case you're counting, I'm 85, Sarah's 75-ish, and we still don't have any children. I could have been killed today! I was fighting four kings! What about your promise?’ To this, God said, Genesis 15:4, “And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: “This man shall not be your heir,” He was talking about a man who was a part of his household from Damascus, right? And Abraham said, ‘Right now,

he's going to be my heir!' God said, 'This man is not going to be your heir,' "your very own son shall be your heir. ⁵ And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." 85 years old. The text says, "And he believed the Lord and it was counted to him as righteousness." He simply believed. God had spoken and he trusted without any evidence and in fact, all physical evidence pointing against what God said He was going to do. Abram would wait another fifteen years after this promise before he and Sarah would have a child. Fifteen years! Twenty-five years from the first time that He had promised. That's a long time to believe against all odds. And yet, he believed.

It wasn't easy for him! If you notice, in the Scripture, that Abraham, who we know as Abraham, his name was Abram to start with. The name Abram means 'the father of many.' Now think about it for a moment. The land of Canaan where Abram lived was in the trade route between Egypt and everything to the north and east. Abram was a wealthy man. The Scriptures say that he had lots of livestock and lots of gold and silver. Furthermore, he camped around the wells, the water wells that were there and so, it's not any stretch of the imagination at all that the caravans would go by Abraham and I'm sure they would eat together and they would water their livestock and they would trade and so, when a new caravan would come through they would introduce themselves and Abram would say, 'My name is Abram, father of many.' And you can see the guys look at him with approval, 'Ah, father of many, that is a good name. How many children, how many sons do you have, Abram?' And Abram would have to say, 'None.' Can you imagine the snickering? 'Ha! Father of many. Father of none.' I wonder about his servants? Every time they said the name Abram, father of many, I wonder if they snickered.

But if it wasn't bad enough, matters would get even worse. Sometime before Isaac was born, God told Abram that he was no longer going to be called Abram, father of many, and Abraham probably breathed a sigh of relief: 'Whew, won't have to explain that again.' And God said, 'You will be Abraham, father of many nations.' So Abraham got up off his knees, said, 'Yes, Lord' and he went out to his servants, he called a staff meeting, and said, 'You shall no longer call me Abram, but you shall call me Abraham, father of many nations.' Do you know how hard that would be? After believing the promise for so many years, facing the ridicule of all, and yet, Abraham believed and trusted. You see, that's what faith does. It believes the impossible. Abraham did not ignore the facts. He was no fool. He was not delusional. He knew that a 100-year-old man should not be having kids. But on the one hand he weighed the impossibility of God breaking His promise and on the other an impossible physical situation, and he chose to believe God's promise. You know, I think it's important for us to consider because you and I may be facing impossible situations, difficult days. Please remember that God's word is always true! Period. Regardless of what your feelings tell you, determine to believe and to trust that God's word is true and stake your life on it. Abraham lived a long time without seeing God's promise fulfilled, and his faith wavered at times, but he believed God and was steadfast in it.

So, God promised Abraham a land, many descendants, but He also promised him a seed, a Redeemer. The greatest test of Abraham's life was not living in a tent all of his life and it wasn't even waiting twenty-five years for God to keep His promise about sending Him a son. But the greatest test of Abraham's faith came after Isaac had been born. It's not hard to imagine how much Abraham loved his son. I was born to older parents and so I can imagine how Abraham and Sarah doted on Isaac. How grateful Abraham was that God had given Isaac to them! And then came that fateful day when God said, 'Abraham I want you to take your son, the

child of promise, to Mount Moriah and there sacrifice him to me.' I can't imagine what Abraham went through that night, that sleepless night, but you know what? The next morning he got up and he left for Mount Moriah. God was testing Abraham's faith. And Abraham didn't know he was being tested. He didn't know what was going on, he just knew what God had said. What God was saying to Abraham was 'Abraham do you trust me?' That's what He was saying. 'Do you trust me, Abraham?'

Now let me pause here in Abraham's story and remind you that God tests your faith and mine. He tests your faith in His promises saying, 'Do you trust me?' Thank God that He doesn't test us in the specific way that He tested Abraham's faith, but He tests us, nonetheless. He puts us in situations, in trials, in difficult relationships, for the purpose of exercising our faith, to share our faith, to prove our faith. 1 Peter 4:12 says, "¹² Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you." We should expect difficult days. It's not a matter of if, but when your faith will be tested. The story of Abraham and his call to sacrifice his son, Isaac, is written to encourage us to stand firm and strong in the promises of God, trusting Him that He will do what He says.

Now let's look at Abraham's faith, this is something that stood out to me that I want you to recognize it about Abraham's faith. As I told you, he said, 'go to Mount Moriah to sacrifice Isaac,' to kill him and offer him as a sacrifice. Well, Mount Moriah was three days journey from where Abraham was. There is a nugget found here that I think is important. Abraham had three days to ponder what God was doing. And that's exactly what it says that he does, in Hebrews 11:19, it says, "he considered what God was doing." He considered. This word, 'considered,' we get our word logarithm from. Actually, logarithm is the transliteration of this original word. It means to calculate and to compute. You see, in that three-day journey, Abraham was thinking. He brought all his power of reasoning and logic to bear in order to consider every aspect of this situation. He was extremely logical, almost mathematical, in how he reasoned. And as he analyzed his situation, and he pored over the ramifications and the implications of what was happening, he turned it over in his mind, over and over again, asking the question, "What is true? What do I know to be true?"

Well he must have said, 'Well I know God gave me Isaac, that Isaac is the son of promise that He promised me.' Abraham knew that from Isaac the whole world would be blessed and that many offspring would come from Isaac, and he knew that God was trustworthy to keep His promise and he knew that there was no limit upon what God could do. So, he reasoned, because God's word is true and His promise always stands, that if he plunged that knife into the chest of his son, God would just have to raise him from the dead. He reasoned and thought, that has to be true. So, he was willing to obey! Listen, Hebrews 11:19, it says, "he considered," logarithm, right? "He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back." That's faith in the promises of God. That's believing and trusting. We read in the story that when Abraham had his arm lifted ready to plunge it into the chest of Isaac, an angel stopped him and a substitute was found, a ram stuck in the thicket, and the ram was sacrificed instead of Isaac.

You see, we see in the story of Abraham, in his willingness to sacrifice his son, a picture, a parable, if you will, of what our Father did when He offered up His only Son to die as a sacrifice for you and for me. In Abraham's story, his hand was stayed, a substitute was found, but in Redemption story we know that there was no substitute to be found for God's own Son. Jesus died, the sacrifice for many. I believe that it was at this point that Abraham understood about Jesus. He understood about the Redeemer to come and in fact he foresaw the Redeemer to

come in this great drama that was played out up on Mount Moriah. I think God gave him a vision of Jesus, the Messiah.

Listen, why I say so, in Galatians 3 it says, “⁸ And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” “¹⁶ Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring,” I love the way Paul writes this, he says, “It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ.” When God promised the Redeemer to Abraham, He said there was one to come, one who would be a Redeemer, who would bless the nations. Now listen to John 8, if you’ll remember back not too long ago, or maybe a really long time ago, we were in John 8:56. Jesus talking to the Jews of the day, said this, “⁵⁶ Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.” ⁵⁷ So the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” ⁵⁸ Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.”

I think in this great drama up on Mount Moriah when the substitute was found for Isaac, that somehow God showed Abraham the day when Jesus would come and redeem for Himself a people, and Abraham saw it! And he was glad! It gave him hope for the future and he believed God and took Him at His word. Guys, we don’t know what God is doing in these crazy times that we live in. Who would’ve thought a year ago that we’d be all scattered out over this auditorium wearing masks? We don’t know what’s coming. We don’t know why we’re here! We may know fewer answers about what He is doing with us as individuals, and the trials that we face, but whatever we face, if we learn nothing else from the story of Abraham, we can learn that we can trust God! Take Him at His word and believe Him. Faith is believing the word of God and acting upon it even when everything that I see around me tries to tell me that it is not true. That’s what faith is. When going through difficult days, ask yourself, what do I know to be true? Think about, consider and logarithm, calculate, what do I know to be true about God? What do I know to be true about myself? What has He promised me? And stand firm!

John Calvin wrote this about Abram, he said, “Let us remember that we are all in the same condition as Abram. Our circumstances are all in opposition to the promises of God. He promises us immortality and yet, we are surrounded by mortality and corruption. He declares that He accounts us as just, yet we are covered with sins. He testifies that He is benevolent toward us, and yet outward signs threaten that He is wrath. What then are we to do?” he writes, “We must close our eyes, disregard ourselves and all things connected with us, so that nothing may hinder or prevent us from believing that God is true.” May we by faith believe that God is true. Let’s pray.