

Altar Builders

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Preacher: Jeff Jackson

[0 : 00] Beloved, adoration is not a passive thing. It's an active thing, isn't it?

To offer adoration to God and guides our worship.

Otherwise, we would worship ourselves. We would worship false gods. This is what we see in the life of Abram all around him. This is what we've been studying about as we've come into this section of Scripture, which is Genesis 12.

If you'd turn there, please. Genesis 12. The title of my message is Altar Builders. Altar Builders. I think that captures the theme of what's happening here in Abram's life.

Whenever we read from the Scriptures, particularly the Old Testament, and we encounter these different stories, these true narratives about things that happened in real people's lives as they interacted with the purposes of God, we want to remember that the hero of these stories is not the main character in terms of the human person, but the hero of the story is always our God.

[1 : 35] Because this is a book written by Him and it is to reveal His character and His dealings with humanity. In this particular case, it happens to be Abram, whose name much later will be changed by God to Abraham.

And that's probably how you know Him. Abram is his name right now. I want to read with you, along with you here, as you follow me, from chapter 12, verse 4, down through the end of the chapter.

We've already looked at verses 1, 2, and 3, which constitute Abram's calling from paganism, from being a moon worshiper, brought into now following God and obeying God and miraculously going from being a moon worshiper to God actually speaking directly to him.

This is direct address to Abram. It's an amazing reality of the grace of God. So verse 4, So Abram went forth, notice, as the Lord had spoken to him.

And Lot went with him. Now Abram was 75 years old when he departed from Haran. Abram took Sarai, his wife, and Lot, his nephew, and all their possessions which they'd accumulated, and the persons which they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan.

[2 : 58] Thus they came to the land of Canaan. That's just simply telling us that he arrived. Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem to the oak of Moreh.

Now the Canaanite was in the land. Well, the Lord appeared to Abram and said, To your descendants I will give this land.

So Abram built an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to him. Then Abram proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east.

And there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord. What's he doing? He's worshipping. Abram journeyed on continuing toward the Negev.

Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there for the famine was severe in the land. It came about when he came near to Egypt that he said to Sarai, his wife, See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman.

[4 : 09] And when the Egyptians see you they will say, This is his wife and they will kill me. But they will let you live. Please say that you are my sister so that it may go well with me because of you and that I may live on account of you.

It came about when Abram came into Egypt the Egyptians indeed saw that the woman was very beautiful. Pharaoh's officials saw her and praised her to Pharaoh.

And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. Therefore he treated Abram well for her sake. He gave him sheep and oxen and donkeys and male and female servants and female donkeys and camels.

That's another way of saying that he made Abram even more wealthy. Very rich. But, verse 17, The Lord struck Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife.

Then Pharaoh called Abram and said, What is this you've done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say she's my sister?

[5 : 18] So that I took her for my wife. Now then, go, go. Here is your wife. Take her and go.

Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him and they escorted Abram away with his wife and all that belonged to him.

And we ask the question, How in the world can we read what's going on in the early part of chapter 12, the latter part of chapter 11, and see all this faithfulness and obedience in the life of this man and then we come to this story.

What is that all about? And what is Israel supposed to learn from this as they are the original readers of this text? What's the message to the people as Moses writes this and wants them to understand and be instructed?

Well, let me ask you a few other questions to get you thinking with me about this. When I ask the question, What image comes to mind as you think of an altar? Just reflect on that for a second.

What kind of image pops into your mind as you consider the concept of an altar? Now, most of us would associate that word with some aspect of worship.

[6 : 25] Am I on safe ground there? I think I am. Some aspect of worship. Whatever you pictured in your mind, we understand that an altar is where we bow our hearts in worship.

Now, that doesn't mean that the altar was built to the true and living God. Right? Many, many, many altars are built every single day and have been since Genesis 3 to false gods.

Primarily one. And that one is you. Yourself. Myself.

Whenever we sin, we are exalting on the altar of worship ourselves. We are lifting ourselves over the truth and the will and the purposes and designs of Almighty God and we're forgetting in those moments that we were created to please Jesus and our salvation.

We were created to live lives that honor Him. The question then about this altar is this. Who or what is your altar for? The question is not are you an altar builder?

[7 : 38] We are all altar builders as you'll hear me say in just a little while. But what's the altar for? Who's the altar for? Now look, like us, Abram faced this particular choice of who and what he would worship each day and in each situation in his life.

Just like we do. He faced that every day of his life. This text is pulling that right out and showing it to us in clear terms. Now think of what Abram is facing now. Let's put ourselves in his shoes.

As he obeys God as he journeys hundreds of miles in months of effort over all kinds of terrain. Most of us are familiar with the terrain in this area.

It's hilly. It's rocky. It's dry. If you don't follow waterways and rivers you could die in a matter of days. Think about all the weather. The kinds of weather. The extreme heat.

All the things that they have to face that way. And then think of this. He has his entire household in tow. Now look. There's no U-Hauls. He's not in an air-conditioned truck doing all the work for him.

[8 : 45] What are they doing? Yeah, man. They're wearing their sandals out. And he's got all these kids. He's got all these women. He's got all these animals. And they've got to think about how they're going to feed all of that as they go from place to place.

Where are they going to get water? All of that's got to be taken into consideration among a ton of other things weighing on this man because he's the patriarch. Abram is the man.

And they're all looking to him to make this thing work. Now let me ask you in that scenario because you're having to use your imagination a little bit here with me. What would push your buttons if you were in Abram's place?

place? If you were out in that context having to do that using your imagination to the best of your ability what would push your buttons? What would set you on edge?

What would tempt you? What would you struggle with? I'm not going to tell you mine. I'm going to let you think about yours and I'll think about mine.

[9 : 48] How would you handle for example the temptation of fear? Do you think you'd have a little bit of struggle with some fears?

What about worry? What about temptations to be anxious? Anxiety? What about all of this surrounding the unknown? You have to remember now this man is traveling into an area he's never been before in his life.

Around a culture he's never been exposed to. Now that we're after the Tower of Babel perhaps languages that he's never dealt with before. A people he doesn't know. And these people don't love God. This is the point of the text telling us and the Canaanite was in the land. That's not good. That's like saying there were hostile engines in the land or something like that.

This is not a good thing. Think about all of the different things that are going to face him and tempt him including hostile people, wild animals.

[10:54] I mean we hear all kinds of stories about bears and lions attacking people in the scriptures. There are all these other details that concern their survival that Abram has to deal with.

So Abram's decisions, gentlemen think about this. Abram's decisions, Abram's dealings, Abram's demeanor, and his ability to deny himself in his walk with God are all very critical aspects of his leadership of his family.

Is that not correct? What if Abram decides one day to have a pity party? What if he decides one day that he's just tired of all this walking around? We're going to find a nice lake somewhere and camp out and just stay there for a while.

That's not what God's commissioning him to do. What about all of that? Folks, we need to keep in mind that this is being written by Moses more than 700 years after these events took place.

Moses is writing to the Israelites to inform them of their heritage, to instruct them about important aspects of their relationship to God. And one of those aspects of how God relates to his people concerns God's sovereignty.

[12:17] Israel, as they stand on one side of the river getting ready to cross over to the other side and do battle. People are going to lose their lives. Wives are going to lose their husbands.

Children are going to lose their daddies. If these people don't understand God's sovereignty and live under that sovereignty, they're going to suffer. Now we know by reading ahead, that's exactly what happened, isn't it?

But Moses is trying to help these people understand they have a God who has their back, their front, their sides. He is sovereign. He is in control.

This is what they need to understand. I want to throw this up here and help you with a definition of sovereignty that we're going to be working from. God's sovereignty can be understood as the sum total of his attributes.

For instance, authority, power, knowledge, wisdom, righteousness. That's not all of them, but there you go. Which allow him to rule over and control. That's the operative issue.

[13:17] Which allow him to rule over and control all things with absolute perfection. Now that comes over into your life. Do you serve a sovereign God?

Is he sovereign over your life? Does he have that kind of control and attention to detail in your life? Because if you're honest, you're going to come back and tell me it doesn't feel like that all the time. Right? It doesn't feel like that all the time. But does that make it untrue? No, absolutely not. Now look, walking with the Lord is about faithfulness.

And here's how we understand that. It's about God's faithfulness which never fails. And then it's our faithful response to God's goodness and faithfulness to us.

Now camp out there for a second. Because this is why Abram failed. This is the key to Abram's failure. But this is also the key to Abram being restored in his walk with God.

[14:25] Because God has plans for this guy. And even this guy's sin, Abram's own sin, is not powerful enough to thwart the purposes of God in his life. This is really good news for us.

It should encourage you to live for the Lord this week. Perhaps in ways that even go beyond last week. Maybe more consistency in your walk with the Lord.

Or your prayer life. Or your devotion to God. The sense of warmth that you feel. Or comfort that you need. Whatever. As you trust God. This is a very, very important concept that I don't want to just blow by.

Walking with the Lord. Having a relationship with God. Moment to moment. Through Christ Jesus. As New Testament saints. Is about faithfulness. On God's side it means that He is faithful and never fails in that faithfulness.

Amen. So that's the rock. That's the standard. Right? That's what we build on. And then there's the second part. It's our faithful response.

[15 : 29] But to whom? To God. We are responding to God's goodness and faithfulness to us. Abram took his eyes off the ball. He took his eyes off of that.

And when he did bad things happened to the people around him. And he asked for something that was way, way outside the bounds of shepherding his wife.

And taking care of all of those people who were under him and looking to him to guide them in what was true. All he had to do was put his eyes on himself and stop making it about a faithful response to God's goodness and faithfulness to him.

As soon as that changed, the course of what he was doing changed. Right? Now the reason I'm sharing this with you is it doesn't have to be any more complicated than this. We sometimes make sin too complicated.

You sin because you want to. There it is. You never sin beyond what you want. If you didn't want it, you wouldn't do it.

[16 : 36] People come in for counseling and we talk about this and they sit there and look at me kind of stunned when I say this because they expect for me to go psychotherapy on them and make it a lot more complicated than it is and I just tell them no.

The more complicated I make it, the more dependent you become on me for your answers. I'm going to take you to the truth and show you what God says. Sin is lawlessness. That's what it says. And when we choose lawlessness, we're choosing self. Abram chose self. And in the course of doing that, people around him suffered. That's the way it always happens.

when we choose to sin, the people around us and who depend on us and who love us and who care about us most, they suffer with us. And it's not right. And it ought to sober us.

Now in 12, 4 through 20, we'll break it down like this. Abram responds to God in two ways which couldn't differ more from one another.

[17 : 41] We've already read the text, so you see that. Now I think that you're going to relate to how Abram's responses mirror our own walk with God.

So I'm going to tell you I'm blessed by what God included in this passage. It's kind of hard to think about, but I'm blessed by it and I hope you will be too. And the reason is this.

The Lord recounted both the good and the sinful responses of Abram. He does that throughout the Bible with his people. Paul would talk about this. Peter would talk about this.

We know Peter failed the Lord miserably and yet we see these men restored in the Lord. We see them walking. We see women saved out of an adult lifetime of prostitution for heaven's sake and brought over to be these clean women in the sight of God.

Souls purified in the Lord. Servants of the Most High God when they used to be involved in something so vile. But that's the power of God, isn't it?

[18 : 42] To wash the human soul and then make us purposeful. God is in the business of doing salvation miracles in the souls of men and women. The first thing then I want to point out to you as we break this down together into these two major halves is this.

Abram's faith. We have to start there because that's where the text takes us in 4 through 9. It tells us that right on the heels of God calling Abram out of Haran and telling him to go into this land called Canaan which he's never been in before Abram says okay we'll do this.

So Abram went forth as the Lord had spoken to him. As the Lord had spoken to him. That is critical. It's the same thing that we are called to live by in our walk with Christ.

As Jesus has spoken to us in his word we are basing our life on the truth. Now Moses gives us so many details here about Abram's moving from Haran into the land of Canaan.

The reason is these details combine to tell us about Abram's entire life being put into this obedience to God.

[19 : 57] and it affected his entire household. In other words Abram's not going at this by halves. There's no half-baked measure here. Abram has thrown his entire life into this obedience to Almighty God.

And I like that about him. I think that's one of the character traits about Abram I appreciate very much. I want you to think about this as we come to this in just a moment. Think about what's ahead as God calls on Abram to take a son that he has waited for his entire adult lifetime.

His wife Sarai has been barren in her womb since they married. So she can't have kids and she's lived under that shame. I'll preach that God willing when we get there. But a time is coming in his life where God's going to tell him to take the most precious thing in his life beyond his wife and

sacrifice him to God.

You understand that's plunging a knife into the heart of your own son so that he expires. Right? That's coming. And so whatever we see happening in this chapter realize what God is getting this man ready for.

That and much more. So let that be something you can look ahead and think about. You mean Jeff the point is that God is always getting us ready for the next thing? Yes. That's exactly right.

[21 : 23] And so what we want to live like is this. We want to live in response to God's goodness and God's direction in our life. Trusting God in the moment of trial, challenge, uncertainty, unknown.

Learning to do that. Learning to do that in our walk with the Lord. Knowing that God is getting me ready for the next thing. And you know what Dave? You know what the next thing might be for Jeff? Heaven. Heaven. I don't know, do I?

The next thing may not be something here on earth. The next thing for Jeff may be Jeff's gone and you're looking for another pastor and you sing songs in my honor because you say he's with Jesus now.

And I want you to do that. Alright? This may be the way that it works out. I want us to take careful note of the object of Abram's faith.

He could be tempted to put his eyes on so many different things and we'll see him do that in a way that's going to hurt him in a little while. But it's God himself that Abram is putting his faith in.

[22 : 22] And while he's doing that things are moving along. It's not that everything's hunky-dory. Look, what he's doing is hard. Dirty, dusty, sweaty work.

Being this nomad thing, man. That's tough. But he's trusting God. And as he does what the Lord tells him to do, he understands and experiences peace in his soul and the blessing of God.

It's what we read in Psalm 4. As long as Abram abides in this, as long as Abram abides in as the Lord had spoken to him. You see it? As long as he does that, he's going to know joy and peace in doing the Lord's will.

That's just not very complicated, is it? Let's not overthink this and twist it into something that it's not. The text tells us that Abram is 75 years old.

So that's more than 10 years. That's 12 years older than I am right now. And even though he's going to live another, I think he died at 150. Does anybody remember? I think, 175?

[23 : 29] Yeah, okay, thanks. 175. Even though he lives that long, 75 years old, that's old, isn't it? No, it's not. I'm not that far off. It sounds like it.

And look, he's 75 along with everyone he loves and all that he owns. Verse 5 tells us, look at verse 5, tells us that he came to the land of Canaan. And I want to show you real quickly what we're talking about here.

If you look at the map, I'm going to use this one over here, guys, for y'all though. You just kind of look. You can see that Ur, if you look down in the bottom right corner, here's Ur. So this is where he started with his dad, Terah.

And they were moon worshipping in Ur. Remember I told you that very near Ur is where that one city was established by Nimrod. So several of the cities that you see moving up through this fertile crescent here, this is the fertile crescent between the rivers, many of these cities were established by Nimrod himself or the people that came right after Nimrod.

So they travel from Ur up to Haran and then from Haran he goes over probably to Carchemish. Some say that he went on a straight line to Aleppo.

[24 : 40] But he came down through here. This area right here that I'm showing you, that's known as the King's Highway. That's going to become important in Abram's life in a little while right here.

So he came from Haran over down into central Palestine as we know Israel. today. And then he traveled down into Egypt through what is the Negev.

If you look at the bottom of where the Dead Sea is, where Beersheba is, this is the Negev right below that area. And then beyond that is Sinai.

This is Sinai. And then over into Egypt. So man, this is tough going for this guy. Ur to Haran where he first settled with Terah and then his dad died.

Ur to Haran is about 600 miles on foot. That would have taken him over a month. Haran to Shechem down to central Israel is about 400 miles.

[25 : 44] That also would have taken him about a month or more given the large entourage that he had. for them to make 20 miles a day would have been generous.

So it probably would have taken him over a month to go that far. Now from this part of Canaan to Egypt and back would be another 500 miles added to all of that. And so since he left his hometown in Ur, Abram has traveled more than 1,500 miles on foot in that span of time with all of his people and possessions.

Man. Now verse 6 Abram passed through the land as far as the side of Shechem to the oak of Morah. So they're giving us these landmarks. And now the Canaanite was there in the land. Abram travels to a city known then as Shechem in what is now known to us as the West Bank in central Israel.

Verse 6 Add this ominous detail. Now the Canaanite was in the land. What's that all about? I've already hinted we already know that the Canaanite denotes the worst expressions of human depravity.

[26 : 55] So God is leading Abram into the heart hear this into the heart of Satan's earthly lair in the two terribly terribly wicked pagan cultures of both Canaan and Egypt.

Don't let the sophistication of Egypt with the pyramids and the beautiful tombs and all that stuff fool you. The Egyptians were sickening idol worshippers.

Idol worshippers. You might remember from earlier when we did the list of genealogies from Noah through Ham. Ham was the one who had his son Mitzrayim and Mitzrayim founded the Egyptian culture.

That's where the Egyptians come from. Mitzrayim also established the Philistines. And so we have two cultures the Philistines and the Egyptians who were going to exert enormous pressure and influence on the people of Israel to draw them away from the Lord.

And God's going to use those nations mightily to discipline Israel. Notice with me if you will in verse 7 the Lord appeared to Abram and said to your descendants I will give this land.

[28 : 14] So Abram built an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to him. So we have two significant details here. First God tells Abram to your descendants your seed I will give this land.

So where he is now in the heart isn't that interesting in the heart of central Israel in what is now the west bank think of that politically God said to Abram this is the land I will give to your descendants this land and so the Bible settles that issue pretty quickly this is the land which will make up Israel that God promised to them and will ultimately give to them and then secondly that's the first one secondly God appears to Abram and Abram responds in worship worship this is very interesting in what sense did God appear to Abram it's a good question the construction of this Hebrew verb is in the nephal and it translates as to present oneself to be seen or to be visible and so what it suggests to us is that

God was visible to Abram in some way which is no minor thing remember if you see the Lord people now here's the deal theologians refer to this you see the bottom of the screen theologians refer to this as a theophany a theophany is an appearance of God in some physical form Christians and Hebrews Israelites weren't the only ones to couch this word use this word Greeks used it of their deities appearing in some form in their minds and all that kind of thing but this is what we're talking about theophany comes from two

Greek words compounded together theos which means you know God and then finain finain and it means to appear God appearing that's where we get theophany from and then we also see Christophany you see it there at the very bottom of the screen that is an early appearance of the second member of the trinity or Jesus Christ we will we will see that happen in just a little while as we get further in to Genesis it's very very interesting I thought I'm just getting you ready for that eventuality so here's the deal whatever form it was God did for Abraham in a way similar that he did for Moses what do I mean well Moses saw the Lord and lived didn't he and so now we have Abram seeing the Lord and talking in direct address with the Lord and he lives and so I don't think that blessing was wasted on Abram at all I don't and so what does he do in response to this fact that he has the

God of God addressing him directly talking to him personally and in some form God makes himself manifest to Abram what does Abram do he falls on his knees he builds an altar and he worships right that's appropriate isn't it this is exactly what I think Abram's heart was full for he was full for worship in God now the text emphasized this response of worship again if you'll notice in verse 8 then Abram proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel he pitched his tent he had Bethel on the west ai on the east and there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord you know one of the reasons that I think God is mentioning in detail these geographic

locations these towns etc is so the Israelites and original readers would understand how God is marking!

[32 : 33] out the land! that he's giving to them this is your land these towns will be your towns he'll tell them later I'm going to give you towns you didn't build I'm going to give you crops you didn't plant I'm going to give you treasures that you didn't earn and it's not because you're better than these people it's because I've set my love on you that's the reason that he chose!

Israel over all graciousness of your God he gets to choose he gets to pick I told you this was about sovereignty I wasn't kidding this is about the sovereignty of God here in this worship at the end of verse 8 we have ancient Bethel near the modern city of Ramallah most of you probably heard of Ramallah again that is in the center of the west bank so here in the very heart of the land of Israel or what is known then as Canaan Abram is doing something that no human being has ever done before to this particular time in human history Abram is building an altar to the true God of the universe and worshipping him right in the heart of Satan's human lair and my rockets lit at that point I about lifted out of my chair exactly what he did when he saved you he marched into Satan's territory because you were a slave of the devil and rescued you and transferred you from the domain of darkness into the domain of light in his holy son Jesus Christ for your forgiveness of sins that is Colossians chapter 1 13 and 14 that's what he did he is still doing it he was doing it for Abram he does it for you he is going to continue to do it until he is finished and his purposes are served and then we'll all join him in heaven we'll get to see Abram I believe that I believe we'll get to see these heroes of the faith this is the work that is happening and that God is inspiring in Abram right in the heart of the most pagan land on the planet at this time now notice that Abram builds another physical altar to

God he spends time formally worshipping the Lord all around him are these pagans who hate God and worship their false deities in the most horrible of ways and yet here's this man Abram a man intent on honoring God we're all made by God to worship Abram object of worship is the Lord I just don't want that to be wasted on us the difference in Abram from his neighbors is the object of Abram's faith that's the difference between you and your unsaved family members and friends and co-workers and neighbors the difference between you and them isn't that you're better than them it's that your object of faith is the Lord Jesus Christ and Jesus is the difference in your life is that not true I hope that's the truth I hope people see that difference in you they look at you and say boy you're weird have you ever had anybody say you're just weird you're just a different pup now you want them to define it right well what do you mean by weird and you hope that what they're going to say is your life just is ordered so differently your priorities are so different from what we typically see we don't see you freaking out over all the stuff that happens to you in life I mean you've had some tough stuff and we don't see you freaking out we see you sad sometimes we hear you talk about praying and having to deal with some of the grief or sadness that you but you always seem!

[36 : 36] to have hope you always seem you don't seem to despair and we understand that difference is spelled j-e-s-u-s right we understand that and we want to help them understand that's the way it works Abram believes trusts!

and obeys God that's the difference friends look up at the screen here we are all altar builders we are all altar! builders what does it say we build them every single day of our lives our altars are the things and people we trust in for what we want most they're the things and people we trust in for doing for us what only God can do that's what's wrong with it I have trust in some of you because you're close to me in terms of friendship I have trust in my wife!

there's nothing wrong me what only God can be because that sets her up for failure I don't ask my kids to be for me as a dad what only God can help me be and be for me as my God I don't ask my kids to affirm me as a daddy because I have an ego problem or an insecurity problem or whatever I'm not I'm not asking Suzanne to be something for me that only God can be for me I'm asking her to be a wife that's faithful to the Lord and walk with me in that are you with me on this am I making sense to you about that because we can do this we build altars in our hearts how do I finish this what does the Lord want us to do with these altars of our hearts he wants us to make them about him not about each other and not about myself the altars that we build are based on what we want most in the moment if what

I want most in the moment is affirmation from my brother Dave I might manipulate you control you and say things to you that might be a shade off so that I can get you to say back to me what I want

to hear I might present myself to you with a mask of somebody that I'm not really but I present it to you because I want you to come back and affirm me if that's what's most important to me in the moment I'll manipulate you in a heartbeat Dave this is what he gets for sitting up here in the front looking so eager you're a good brother let your pastor do this so this is the kind of thing we do with each other and as Abram takes his eyes off of the Lord and starts making it about him he gets in a lot of trouble but the problem is it doesn't stop with him it affects the people around him that is always the way cancer works spiritual cancer always spreads to the people closest to you always always always there's so many places we could go is to take you to this place would you turn to Romans 12 with me we're not going to camp out here we're just going to read it and then I'm back into Genesis so hold your finger there Romans 12 is the passage you're very familiar with here at grace Paul has just spent 11 chapters outlining the greatest theological treatise that's ever been he has described in those 11 chapters the mercies of God and the salvation that we find in Jesus Christ and so he says in 12:1 as he begins to transition in his book here therefore I urge you you is plural and so I think he's talking to the church here therefore I urge you as the people of God brothers by the mercies of God by all that I've!

[40:32] recounted to you in the first 11 chapters here that we call chapters the mercies of God I've outlined to do what based on the mercies of God to save you present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice do you see that acceptable to God which is your spiritual service of worship this is how we offer ourselves on the altar of worshiping God our bodies belong to him we are bought with the blood of his son and so in verse two he says based on that worship do not be conformed to this world because why we don't belong to it anymore but instead be transformed you need to read that as spiritual transformation be transformed by the renewing of your heart your mind purpose so that you may prove what the will of

God is that which is good acceptable and perfect so your life of worship should constantly be an offering of proving that God is good and that we serve a God who has made us acceptable to him a God who's doing a great work in our lives for him and so it's not about coming to church on Sunday and doing worship and checking that box and going and living however you want that is not Christianity folks that's not we don't preach that here at grace what he's talking about here is a lifestyle because you have been transformed from the inner man out and what people see in the way that you live every day in worship to God in every area of your life characterizes the reality that you've been transformed in your inner person and you serve the Lord not self which is the alternative our most precious altar is the one we build every single day by the life we live as our heart of worship to

God God I gratefully get up on the altar I don't squirm off I stay on that altar because that's where I want to be as I worship you I want to trust you!

You've got me here to worship you and I'm going to try to make everything I say and do about worshiping you pleasing you honoring you and when I fail because I will I want to rush in a repentant soul and a broken heartedness to you ask for your forgiveness confess the sin before you and then trust that you will cleanse me from all unrighteousness!

in my life you'll repentance saying I'm so sorry that I did that daddy or mommy would you say get out of here I ain't listening to you how many times have you come back to me and said mess like that get out of here when you're ready to get serious come on back how many of us would do that to our children is God any different in terms of how he loves his children I love of

[44:21] God the love of God he loves you he loves you and your sin will never take that love away from his heart for you isn't that good well look folks back to Genesis from here from here Abram continued then into the dry country of the Negev boy that's a that's a harsh place the Negev the area I told you of the desert in the most southern part of Canaan or what we know as Israel today now from here this took him into Egypt and here's where we are confronted with an entirely different response of Abram's heart toward God and this response is expressed in Abram's frailty as a man and in his fear of man we're going to see both of those in his life now there was a famine in the land so Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there for the famine was severe so that's the catalyst that's the reason behind

Abram's initial issue here in verse 4 then what we're looking at is Abram's failure sorry in verse 4 Abram is responding to God according to his knowledge of God's will that's in verse 4 and that's fantastic but in verse 10 we have an entirely different response actually what we have is Abram reacting more than responding he's reacting to the famine apart from what he knows of God's will

so now we're back to the beginning of my message when I threw that up there and told you you've got to hold on to this he took his focus off of the Lord and that changed everything and that's where we are now I want to ask you as we by trusting God and being obedient to his word have you ever found yourself responding in obedience and faithfulness to

God during a difficult time yeah okay and so you have every reason to trust the Lord you have every reason to believe the Lord you have every reason to have confidence that God will work in your heart for you to be able!

that just like Abram that's what we're seeing in his life you felt like you handled that pretty well that the Lord was pleased with your obedience and trust you don't have to get all puffed up about that to be encouraged that God is working in your life and helping you overcome sin and temptation and do things on the front end before they got bad and you had to repent that's good we want to live there and then see those two words are a problem because life keeps going you just want it to stop right there and bask in the moment let me just stay here and bask in the success and then in another moment in another situation of life you thought this man how did I end up in this mess or finding yourself confessing to God something like this Lord how did

I get here Lord what am I doing here this is not where I want to be here I am again having to tell you what you already know I failed you Lord I am not even sure that I know how or why I did this that's what's so hard for me Lord is please forgive me I am not sure what to do I feel weak right now I am struggling to believe that you are going to forgive me for this weakness I just don't even know what to say to you you ever been there what happens to us in that moment what happened to Abram in one instance leaving everything he knew trusting God obeying God in a very very hard thing but but in another similar moment of challenge to his trust and obedience to God he completely blows the whole thing by taking matters into his own hands here's what he does he lies do you see this he lies he manipulates he controls

[48 : 47] Abram puts those he loves in harm's way and all of this to save his own skin the Bible doesn't hedge look what it says there was a famine in the land so they sojourned toward Egypt because Egypt has the Nile River so many of the people in antiquity when there was a famine headed to Egypt because Egypt has the Nile River and so they have all of this water they can irrigate with and so they had these issues now it's not that they didn't suffer from famine at times but nevertheless they had this going on and so what does it say it came about when he came near to Egypt that he said to Sarai his wife see now I know that you're a beautiful woman when the Egyptians see you here's what's going to happen I'm telling you they're going to say this is his wife and you know what they're going to kill me so they can take you and so what's the issue what's difference this is what we're trying to get at what's the difference between

Abraham and the first half of chapter 12 and Abraham and the second half of chapter 12 it's divided by ten verses what are we supposed to make it the difference is in Abraham's change of focus is a change of focus he built an altar in his heart to a different God this time it was a false God of!

he sacrificed his trust in the true God to the false God of fear do you see fear here I'm afraid I'm afraid these guys are going to kill me I've got this wonderful rock star looking wife and they're going to see her and they're going to say yeah yeah we're going to do something with that we got to get rid of the old guy and then we'll take her Sarai was 10 years younger than Abram so check this out man at 65 years old she still looking pretty good amazing this is the work of the Lord so this was you were right somebody said it this was about self it has to do with what Abram put his eyes on it's what he put his faith in in that moment we can love the Lord and shift our allegiance in a moment depending on the circumstance now it ought not to be that way but it is that way his strongest desires in this situation of his life were rooted in his loyalty to himself that's where we get in trouble when our loyalty to our self overrides and exceeds our loyalty to the

Lord Jesus Christ in that moment we're in a dangerous place what God did was he used the famine to reveal his heart of fear in circumstances beyond his control so he tested him and did he pass or fail failed he did fail and so here's what I can sum it up with God used the famine to reveal Abram's frailty as a man and God used Pharaoh to reveal Abram's fear of man so what are we saying well the story is plain enough in what it tells us we don't have to take it apart piece by piece Sarai was Abram's half sister so he told the half truth if that's even possible to do I don't believe it is but Sarai was Abram's half sister but she was more importantly his wife in the eyes of the Lord so he knew that and fearing that they would kill him and take

Sarai what he does is he probably justified it in his mind by saying something like this well if they kill me and take her then she has to live in all of that and so you know I'm doing this for her don't we do stuff like that we do stuff like that I've done stuff like that so I think that's out of this for the deal he's going to get some stuff in trade and sure enough Pharaoh heaped wealth on Abram in exchange for beautiful Sarai Abram's decisions and actions accurately reflect the attitude of his heart that's the issue in this particular situation so is he trusting God I wonder Abram did you pray about this did you take your fear to the Lord did you say Lord look this is the deal did you seek the Lord for wisdom and protection it doesn't appear so and I think we do some pretty selfish stuff for some bizarre reasons when we get like this in

[53 : 39] Abram's case he's scared for his life so he throws his wife under the Egyptian bus as it were doesn't he and if God hadn't pulled her out it would run right over her so I'm glad God shows up in just a minute he's not trusting the Lord anxiety about the famine what did it do to him this is just the way our enemy works anxiety about the famine fan the flame of insecurity in Abram's heart I think he'd been probably facing this the whole time he's journeying but he's been able to trust the Lord in it and see it overcome but invasion and famine probably in the reverse order because famine happened a little more often than invasion they absolutely feared terrified fear of famine they didn't have an answer to it if they didn't leave and go somewhere else people starved to death wholesale and so

I think that the famine fanned the flame of that insecurity in his heart and fear of Pharaoh fear of Pharaoh probably at that time the mightiest person the mightiest kingdom on the planet at that moment that was like pouring gallons of gas on that flame and it turned Abram's insecurity into a fire storm of faithlessness he became so committed to his own agenda he sinned against the Lord and here's the thing guys gentlemen in our leadership as he did that he required his loved ones to sin along with him now you may not go to your wife and kids and tell them to do things or say things that are directly sinful as to get them to do what you say you go do this and this and this and I know it's wrong but do it anyway you might not do that but when we choose to follow sin even in quote unquote private ways what are we doing to our families what are we doing to the people we love most how are we affecting them as we take ourselves out of that faithfulness to God and serve self now I'm not an open vessel and channel of God's blessing to the people that are under my care and responsibility I'm too busy focused on me and my little!

private sin my little chase after self and personal pleasure listen we can do some bizarre things when we get like this I've seen it I've heard it I've worked with this all my adult life not to mention I'm a guy too look here's how the Bible defines it each one is tempted when he's carried away and enticed by his own lust not somebody else's yours so it could be greed it doesn't have to be sexual lust doesn't refer to just sexual sin it could be greed pride selfishness in some form then when lust is conceived when your greed your pride is conceived in full it gives birth to what sin because you've given yourself over to that desire you've made that your God and your God is going to demand of you when sin is accomplished it brings forth death that's the raw reality that sin and Satan don't want you to think about this is the process we all experience when we sin and if we're honest with ourselves we're honest with the

Lord we can all relate to Abram's failure what does the Bible say about our heart in Jeremiah 17 desperately wicked and deceitful who can know it you can't even know your heart I can't even know in Hebrews 4 12 will tell us that too 13 2 Corinthians 11 3 I'll read this one real quickly and then move on I'm almost to the final deal here 2 Corinthians 11 3 we turn to this passage often because it captures this deceit that I'm talking about related to our heart. Paul says, I'm afraid, I'm deeply concerned that as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your hearts, your minds will be led astray from two things, a simple and pure devotion to Jesus Christ. That's what Satan wants to undermine in your heart, a simple and pure devotion to Jesus. And he'll do it every time if you give him the opportunity for it. Well, we got to get past the failure. So we'll do this real quickly. God's faithfulness, because we're going to see more of this as I develop the next chapter with you. God's faithfulness.

[58 : 30] The Lord struck Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife, and not to try and be comical or anything, but to tell you that Pharaoh freaked out, didn't he? He just, he lost it.

And rightly so. This took him by surprise. Look, left to himself and his own devices, Abram made to be a poor God. He was a poor God. He tried to be God and it didn't work. But God is faithful to his

promises.

God's faithful to his truth, his people, even when we're not. So please notice the most important element of this entire passage. Here it is. I'm going to put it right up on the screen for you to see. Here's the most important part of this entire thing. It's in verse 17. But the Lord. Just imagine what this passage would read like if we didn't have that.

But the Lord. But the Lord what? But the Lord produces wholeness and goodness from what man corrupts. But the Lord protects his promise and promotes his purposes in all things. Hallelujah.

[59 : 37] But the Lord preserves his servants in holiness and in the fear of the Lord. Did he not do that in Abram's life? There's going to be a lot more going on in Abram's life. Jesus Christ is going to trace his lineage all the way back to Abram, isn't he? Yeah. So in some way or ways, Pharaoh came to know the truth about Sarai. The Bible doesn't tell us how he found out other than the plagues that came on him.

He put it together somehow. The text makes it clear that the plagues God sent blew the lid off the lie. Pharaoh wasted no time trying to reverse course with Sarai. He immediately knew where the problem was.

And so he found out in some way that Abram had lied to him. Now here's a double-sided reality to this. One side, harsh, hopeless. The other side, humbling, honorable, hopeful. Abram compromised his wife.

He wouldn't protect Sarai from sinning against the Lord. In fact, he encouraged her to sin and let her to do it. It's tough. It's hard. Abram wouldn't do the right thing. And that's the hopeless side.

The Lord did what Abram wouldn't do. And that's the hopeful side. That's where we live. We never would have come to the Lord. So the Lord came to us. We never would have sacrificed ourselves on any altar other than ourselves. And so God sent his son to die on that altar so that we could be free. Pharaoh should have killed Abram for this disgrace. And in many other circumstances, Abram would have been toast.

[61 : 17] But what's the Lord doing? This is the sovereignty of God. The Lord protected both the sinner, Abram, and the sinned against, Sarai. Did Sarai go in to Pharaoh? Did she commit adultery? No, she did not.

But only by the grace of God. Or that man would have took her. And she could have complained. She could have said things. I imagine she was in a tough spot because if she told anybody the truth, she probably was afraid they'd kill her husband. So what does she do? Does she let herself be defiled?

Or does she speak up and take the chance that they're going to be so mad they'll kill him? Do you see what he did to her? Isn't that horrible, guys? When we don't walk with the Lord, guys, we compromise the people closest to us. That's just the way it is.

Again, that can't be the ultimate reason that we follow the Lord. I've told Suzanne all along, the years that we've been married, 41, Suzanne? 41 years. And I've told her, some of you have heard me say this, my faithfulness to Suzanne goes beyond the fact that I love Suzanne. I am more faithful to Suzanne because I love the Lord. And I told her, you want it that way. That's the way you want it, in that order. I stay faithful to my wife because I love Jesus. And I love you, Suzanne. That's the way we want it. God is big enough to accomplish all this and more in our lives. And so the message here is that God is going to protect his promise of a godly line.

[62 : 53] Nothing, nothing, no one will be able to thwart the Lord in his promise in Genesis 3, 15. I will hold a godly line. And from that godly line, my deliverer will come. Nothing's going to forth that. Even Abram's sin. Look, here's the point in all of that. Our sin is not greater than God's grace in Christ. It's not. We all live with the residual effects of our sinful nature.

We all have that to deal with every day. The world, the flesh, the devil, powerful forces. They constantly work against the current of God's grace in your life and my life as a pastor, as a husband, as a dad. Fortunately, God's grace in Christ has overcome the world. It's overcome the flesh, overcome the devil. God's grace empowers us and teaches us to say no to ungodliness, where we used to chase it. Now we say no. So for the people reading this for the first time, the Hebrews, and then for us, of course, the issue is this. Here's the issue.

To whom or what will our hearts build our altars? Self, fear, worry, anxiety, anger, the unknown, people, stuff, money, ideals. The list is endless, isn't it? Cars, hobbies, stuff, whatever. Or will we guard and direct our hearts to build our altars to God from the love of our hearts for him and his word?

Which will it be? In Psalm 4, we had this. Tremble and do not sin. Meditate in your heart upon your bed and be still. Be still. Offer up the sacrifices of righteousness and trust, trust, trust in the Lord. Will you join me in prayer? Father, your word is faithful and true. Your actions are always perfect. They are perfect in their timing. They are perfect in their content.

[64 : 42] They are perfect in all that you do as you purpose to bring us into greater conformity, likeness to your Son, Jesus Christ. So as you work your work of wonderful grace and kindness, grace upon grace, help us to be found as a people willingly repenting and submitting.

Help us on our end strive in the discipline of the Holy Spirit to walk with you, Lord, and to know the one thing that you want us to know more than any other thing.

You want us to know the love you have for us as our Father. Help us to know your love. Your love transforms us. That becomes the motivation, Father, for us to keep your commandments.

As Jesus said, if you love me, you'll keep my commandments. So help us to know your love and grow in that love. Because I know that that will bring us to love you very deeply.

Thank you for your souls here today and for your word of truth through the life of Abram. We'll see many more things, God willing, as you work in this man's life. We'll see him grow and we'll see him trust and be mightily used.

[65 : 54] And so thank you, God, that you are the God of mercy and kindness, forgiving our failures, helping us to walk with you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. To God be the glory.

Well, let's transition and sing.