

98-09-20a

The hymn that we just sang, Bound for the Promised Land, views the Promised Land in terms of heaven. It talks about the eternal future where there's no sickness and no death and so forth. And that has been a common understanding of the picture presented in the scriptures of Israel coming to the Jordan River and crossing into the Promised Land.

In a lot of our hymnology and in a lot of our church tradition, crossing the Jordan is understood as passing through the experience of death into the eternal future. And it can be understood that way, but the primary picture that that gives us is of, through faith in the promises of God and the provision of God, moving into the place of blessing and the place of fulfillment of God's call. God called his people to leave behind the things that surrounded them, whether it's their culture, their circumstances or whatever, and move into the place that God called them to.

And to enter the Promised Land is primarily a picture of reaching the place of fellowship and the place of function. The Promised Land is the place where God will cause his presence to dwell. God does not have the Israelites build a temple in Egypt, even though they lived there 430 years.

God's presence doesn't come down and manifest itself for worship, for fellowship, for communication with his people in Egypt. It's in the land of promise. The temple is not built until the enemies are driven out of the land.

And the promise that God makes to David is, when you have driven out the enemies, your son will build the dwelling place for my name and for my presence. But there is a link between those two, because when we do move in that direction, when we in our spiritual lives dedicate ourselves to the things of God as our primary motivation, as our first priority, and we begin to experience the presence of God within us, the indwelling presence of Jesus Christ, the indwelling presence of God the Father, when we are in fact the temple of God the Holy Spirit, this is spiritually for us crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land. It is a step that we take by faith.

It requires effort and concentration and focus to remain in that place and not be distracted, not be driven out of the land, not be, as we're going to see this morning in the experience of Abraham, he arrives in the land of promise, but he doesn't stay there very long. In the space of one verse, we're going to see Abraham depart the land. When we are in that place spiritually, we, as the, you remember the song, Blessed Assurance, Jesus is mine, oh, what a foretaste of glory divine.

We reach into the future, into the eternal future, and bring back into this present life eternal glory, eternal peace, eternal fellowship that is a foretaste of what we will experience throughout the eternal future. So we don't have to wait. People say, oh, I can't wait till I cross chilly Jordan and get to the other side to my mansion in the streets

of gold and so forth.

We don't have to wait. When we, by faith, advance down that narrow road and through that straight gate, we cross the Jordan into a greater place of fellowship and function in this life. We have to be focused on it.

We have to understand what it is. We have to recognize the opportunity that God has put before us to experience eternal blessings now. God has given us all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places, Ephesians chapter 1 tells us.

We literally reach into heaven, reach into the eternal future, and pull those things into our present life by faith. And so there is a link when we look at the promised land, when we look at the place of promise, the place of fellowship and function in God's economy. It is an eternal hope.

It is the hope that motivates us on a daily basis. But we also have the experience of those things in this life. And it is a measure of the power of God.

And it glorifies God when He is able to give us those things in the midst of a fallen, corrupt world before we have even been ultimately sanctified and freed of our sinful nature and so forth. It is a measure of the power of God that we can have those things now. The portion of Scripture we're going to study this morning in the life of Abram is particularly significant in this regard.

And we're going to see that it is possible to lose that focus, to lose sight of that opportunity even as you stand in the land of promise. This leaving of the land and going, in this case, to Egypt is a motif that's repeated several times in Scripture. And it is not primarily a result of physical circumstances, or it should not be.

It is a departure in the mind. It is a loss of focus in the heart that brings about this loss and this leaving. If you turn this morning for our Scripture reading to Isaiah chapter 51, Isaiah is performing his prophetic ministry in a time of crisis in national Israel when the enemies of Israel have come down to take into captivity and carry away the people of God out of the land.

His ministry takes place after the invasion of Sennacherib and the Assyrians coming down to carry off the ten northern tribes. And Isaiah reminds the people of God that the reason this is taking place is because of their loss of focus, their loss of priority on their relationship with God as His chosen people, His chosen representative nation here on earth. Isaiah 51 is one of these chapters that encapsulates that message.

Listen to me, you who follow after righteousness, you who seek the Lord. Look to the rock from which you were hewn and to the hole of the pit from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you.

For I called him alone and blessed him and increased him. For the Lord will comfort Zion, He will comfort all her waste places. He will make her wilderness like Eden and her desert like the garden of the Lord.

Joy and gladness will be found in it, thanksgiving and the voice of melody. Listen to me, my people, and give ear to me, O my nation. For law will proceed from me and I will make my justice rest as a light of the people's.

My righteousness is near, my salvation has gone forth and my arm will judge the people's. The coastlands will wait upon me and on my arm they will trust. Lift up your eyes to the heavens and look on the earth beneath.

For the heavens will vanish away like smoke, the earth will grow old like a garment and those who dwell in it will die in like manner. But my salvation will be forever and my righteousness will not be abolished. Listen to me, you who know righteousness, you people in whose heart is my law.

Do not fear the reproach of men nor be afraid of their insults. For the moth will eat them up like a garment and the worm will eat them like wool. But my righteousness will be forever and my salvation from generation to generation.

Awake, awake, put on strength. This is a little stronger in Hebrew, by the way. It's more like wake up, wake up.

Put on strength, O arm of the Lord. Awake as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Are you not the arm that cut Rahab apart and wounded the serpent? This is not Rahab from Jericho.

This is Rahab, the great denizen of the deep. Are you not the one who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep that made the depths of the sea erode for the redeemed to cross over? So the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness.

Sorrow and sighing shall flee away. I, even I, am he who comforts you. Who are you that you should be afraid of a man who will die or of the son of man who will be made like grass and you forget the Lord your maker who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth? You have feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor when he has prepared to destroy.

And where is the fury of the oppressor? The captive exile hastens that he may be loose, that he should not die in the pit and that his bread should not fail. But I am the Lord your God who divided the sea, whose waves roared. The Lord of hosts is his name.

And I have put my words in your mouth. I have covered you with the shadow of my hand that I may plant the heavens, lay the foundations of the earth, and say to Zion, You are

my people. It's a substantial portion of scripture.

A lot of study could be exhausted on virtually each verse in this. But the idea here is why do you allow yourself to be distracted? Why do you allow yourself to be made fearful? Look at the power of God. Look at the God who calls you and who makes promises to sustain His righteousness forever and to sustain His salvation forever.

Even though the heavens and earth will vanish away, the relationship with God, the righteousness that God grants, the salvation that God provides, those are eternal things. There's a reminder here to look to the rock from which the people of God have been hewn, to look at the hole from which they were dug and to remember the relationship that they have with God. This can easily become sort of a platitude.

Well, remember God, think about God, remember your heavenly home and so forth. But it makes a difference in our daily operation. It ought to make a difference in the way we think about our lives, the way we think about our present circumstances.

If we stop right now and think about where we are, we have relationships with people, we have circumstances, we have employment or people with whom we deal, we have a financial status, we have a place in the culture and the society of our country. Many of these have been issues in our thinking over just the last few weeks and few days. We look at things that are being pushed at us through the media.

We look at the conversations of people around us. We think about if we were given a blank sheet of paper and said, list your top five challenges or your top five problems or your top five concerns. It wouldn't take us 15 seconds to fill out that list.

We have concerns. We have things that weigh on our minds. Do we ever stop as we consider those things and look at them in the light of our eternal identity, our eternal opportunity? Do we recognize that these things are exam questions? The reason these issues are in our lives, it's not just to have an earthly problem with an earthly resolution.

It's not just, well, I'm one in a sea of people who all have problems. This is just my particular set. You and I, as believers and as individuals who have been assigned a place in God's plan, these things may look like just the same sorts of things that face everyone, but they're not.

They're a part of the plan of God, the individual plan of God that has been custom tailored for you and custom tailored for me. And when you look at those things that are concerns, that are issues, that are problems, or circumstances that weigh on our minds, good or bad, it can be the prospect of a great opportunity, something that looks very promising and very energizing to us. We tend to always think in terms of problems.

But whatever the things are that concern you the most, that take up the time in your mind, these are a part of the plan of God. If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ,

these things are written in the plan of God and they exist in your life and in my life for a reason. And it's a spiritual reason.

It is an opportunity to either function the way any godless human being would function or to view those things from the perspective of the eternal, the perspective of righteousness. This is an opportunity for faith. This is an opportunity to apply principles that pertain to us because we belong to Christ, because we are in this time and in this life for a short time and it is an exercise in developing our faith and our perspective in the realm of the divine.

We don't often slow ourselves down to think in those terms, but that's why we're here. That's the only reason God leaves us in this life is to exercise our senses, to discern good and evil, to discern the better things. Turn with me back to Genesis 12 now because we're going to see a great illustration of this truth in the life of Abram.

What has happened thus far in this new section that we have embarked on in Genesis where with the culmination of the line of Shem coming down through Nahor and Terah and Terah begetting the three sons, we've seen that this is often a marker especially in Genesis. You have a man when he has three sons. You're starting a new economy.

You're starting a new section, a new chapter. By rights, we ought to have far fewer chapters in Genesis and the chapter breaks ought to be where you have these men with three sons. How many sons does Adam have? A little trick question there.

He has three total. Cain, Abel, and Seth. How many sons does Noah have? Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

How many sons does Terah have? He has three. Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Terah, like Adam, has a son who dies early.

We don't know that the circumstances are the same, but two of Terah's three sons survive. You have Haran who stays back and you have Abram who goes forward. So now Abram has responded to the call of God recorded in chapter 12.

Get out of your country, from your family, from your father's house to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great.

Now think about this. Abram has been living in Ur of the Chaldees with his family. He has a brother that has passed away.

He's got another brother and a father. They've got a family business going there. They apparently are livestock men, cattlemen.

They have herds of sheep and goats and so forth. They engage in transactions of buying and selling. They buy feed.

They sell wool. They pasture. They contract with herdsmen and so forth.

It's a daily life just like you and I have. They're in a civilization. They're in Ur, which at this time in history is one of the central cities on the planet.

It's big. There's thriving trade and commerce. There's religion and philosophy and culture and art.

A lot like the metroplex that we find ourselves in here. A lot like any place that we find ourselves in in America. With media, we have sort of a sense of being in a culture.

No matter where we are, even if you live in a rural area, this big stew pot of ideas and influences is on us. This is where Abram is. The call of God comes to him there and it says, Get up out of all of this.

Leave your country. Leave your clan. Leave your family and go to the place that I will show you.

Abram doesn't know where this place is yet. He just knows that it's not where he currently is. We are called in the spiritual sense in the same way.

We don't literally pull up stakes out of our neighborhoods and pack the car and go geographically. But mentally, spiritually, we have to pull up stakes from our culture, from the habitual ways of thinking that are ingrained in us because we're Americans and because we live in a technocracy. We have to stop and think, Who am I really? Why am I here really? Is it just to pay the bills? Is it just to raise a family? Is it just to get ahead? Is it just to compete and be shoulder to shoulder with all the people around me? Is that it? Am I going to get to the end of my life and say, Well, you know, I survived life.

I made it to the end and I didn't go bankrupt or I didn't get imprisoned. I didn't suffer premature death or terrible disease or whatever. Are we just trying to negotiate the obstacles in this life with no goal in mind other than I'd like to have a reasonably happy life? We are called.

We have been bought with a price. We're redeemed. We have an identity that transcends this life and we have to latch onto it at some point and decide that we're going to move in that direction and live our life to fulfill that goal.

When we do, we are bound for the promised land. That's when we step onto that narrow road. Statistically, we're in a culture and a time where we love statistics.

Anytime we have to make a decision about current events, somebody's going to present us with a poll. Well, 42% of Americans think this and 65% of Americans think that, as though this is the standard. Well, am I in the mainstream? Am I one of the majority? That's not the measure and it's not the way to tell that we're on the right track.

The Bible says if you're on the right track, you're going to look around and not see very many people at your side. You're not going to see very many people in front of you or very many people behind you. You're going to be on a narrow road that goes through a straight gate and there are going to be few people who find that road.

The very first change of mind as believers that we need to have is a change of mind away from fruitless works, a fruitless way of life, spending our day engaged in activities that are fundamentally, from an eternal perspective, fruitless. So what? Think about people that lived 100 years ago. There was a time when I was really deeply fascinated by the Civil War and I went back and read the accounts.

There's a big four-volume set of books by Douglas Southall Freeman called Lee's Lieutenants and he did another set on R.E. Lee. You can get a great biography of Stonewall Jackson and read about these men. They were caught up in big events.

They lived lives. They wrote letters and you read these letters and you start to find yourself back in time 130 years ago, 135 years ago, in the midst of big events. People had emotions.

They had circumstances. But they've been dead for lo these many decades now. What does it all mean? The men who got mowed down at Gettysburg, the men who died in any one of these battles, they had hopes, they had dreams, they had families, they had plans, they worked on education and so forth.

What does it all mean now? Some people have relatives. They like to say, well, you know, my great-great-great-great-granddad fought at Bull Run or whatever. Well, do you know anything about him? What was the substance of his life? It's all vanished away in the wind of time.

Nobody remembers. Nobody knows their personalities. Nobody knows how well thought of they were or how ill thought of they were.

It has all passed away. What does it mean? At the resurrection, each one of those individuals, whatever their resurrection is, is going to stand before God and the only thing that's going to matter out of their life is where did you stand relative to God? Do you have a relationship with God? Are you redeemed by the blood of the Lamb? And if so, what did you do with the opportunity that God gave you? It doesn't matter how many acres they owned or which crops they planted. It doesn't matter which battle they died in or how well they fought.

The only thing that matters is why did you live the life that you lived relative to God? If we can remind ourselves of that while we are still in the midst of living our lives and while we still have the opportunity to pursue our calling, that's the first step onto the narrow road. This is the step that Abram makes in Ur. He gets the call from God and he

responds.

He says, okay, I'm going to do it. I'm sure that there were a lot of attractions and a lot of ties to keep him in Ur. His father certainly doesn't want to separate from him.

In fact, his father is going to pull up and say, well, I'll go with you. Let's all go. I'll just take charge of this project and let's pack up and we'll go.

And they get halfway there. They make it halfway on this V-shaped path. They get up to Haran and then they stop.

And that's as far as they get. And it's many years before Abram resumes that journey. But in verse 4, apparently after the death of Terah, Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him and Lot went with him.

We're kind of thinning out now. The father never did make the trip. Abram's brother doesn't make the trip.

Now it's just Abram and his nephew Lot. You get the idea that Lot may consider himself to be Abram's heir since Abram is childless and since Lot has no father to pass on the family wealth to. But Lot goes with him.

Abram was 75 years old when he departed from Haran. Abram took Sarah his wife and Lot his brother's son, 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.

Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. We looked at this tree last time. The Canaanites were then in the land.

Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said to your descendants, I will give this land. So there he built an altar to the Lord who had appeared to him. You notice a little bit of repetition here.

It says the Lord appeared to him. He built an altar to the Lord who had appeared to him. It's important that this is the place where God appears to Abram.

God did not appear to Abram in Ur, did He? We don't know of any further divine communication from the point that he receives the call, but the call is the Word of the Lord that comes to Abram. Abram acts on that. Even though he gets delayed, he resumes his momentum here and he arrives and he's now in the land.

When he gets to the land, now he experiences the personal presence of God. God appears to him in this place. So this is progress.

He started out hearing the Word of God, the voice of God. Now he has the experience of

the presence of God. And he worships God.

He builds an altar to the Lord who had appeared to him. Abram is in the right place. He is as close to God as he has ever been.

And he moves 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.

I think this is great. Abram is really hitting on all eight cylinders here. It's interesting that he is between Bethel and Ai.

Why is that? Why isn't he in one or the other of the cities? Well, you have the notice in verse 6 that the Canaanites are then in the land. These are Canaanite cities. Canaanite dwelling places.

Abram doesn't join himself to the Canaanites. He lives out in the open space between. There's where his flocks and herds can find pasture and so forth.

And he doesn't integrate himself in. So he's in the land, but he doesn't join himself to the people of the land. He's maintaining a separation here.

All of this is good. He's calling on the Lord. He's worshipping the Lord.

That gets us all the way up to verse 9. Abram journeyed going on still toward the south. Why does he leave? Normally, when you have someone that's got a lot of flocks and a lot of herds, they're going to move around for pasturage. They're going to move around to sustain their flocks and their herds.

Water may be getting scarce. There may be contention for pasturage. We know later on, Abram and Lot are going to say, we've got to divide up and move a little bit because we're too numerous to all concentrate in this one place.

There doesn't appear to be anything wrong at this point, but you will notice that Abram has arrived at the place where God appears to him. Abram has built an altar to the Lord in that place. He's dwelling between Beth-el, Beth-el, the house of God, and Ai.

He's between the two. Ai is this Canaanite city. Beth-el is the place that Abram named himself because that's the place where God appears to him.

So, he's between the house of God and the Canaanite city of Ai. Ai resonates with us because we know later on in the Exodus, after the Israelites cross over Jordan into the Promised Land, they march around the city of Jericho, have this great victory. The walls fall.

You have the episode with Rahab and so on. The very next city they go to is Ai. And

there they experience a defeat because there's sin in Israel.

The sin of Achan. He's taken spoils from Jericho. It's an unresolved sin.

And when they go against Ai, they are defeated. And they come back beaten and having suffered casualties. And it stops them short.

But at this earlier stage, you have Abram dwelling between. And you almost get the idea that these represent the poles of choice. Here's the house of God.

Here's Beth-El, the place where he built the altar to the Lord, the place where God appeared to him, and Ai, this thriving Canaanite city. He's dwelling between them. And then in the next verse here, he journeys and goes to the south.

There's no commentary. There's no indication that there's anything wrong. But, if you read between the lines here, Abram is putting distance between himself and Beth-El.

He's leaving. He's arrived at this great place. God appeared to him.

Now he's leaving there. Why? Probably circumstances. Grass is getting thin.

Water is getting scarce. Maybe some pressure from surrounding people who say, hey, wait a minute. You come in here.

You're eating up all the pasturage and so forth. There's some circumstance. Abram says, okay, well, maybe I'd better move.

Seems innocuous. You will notice that there is a difference here. When Abram had to make a decision in Ur, it's a clear choice.

Here's the Word of God. I can either obey it or not. If I disobey the Word of God to get up out of my country and kindred and so forth to go, that's clearly a wrong.

It's an easy thing to see. Here, you can rationalize because, well, God didn't say remain in Beth-El. I don't have a direct commandment of God to remain in Beth-El.

There's no sin involved. There's no divine commandment that says I can't move my flocks and herds. I'm a person who moves all around with flocks and herds anyway.

But this is a finer point. This is a higher challenge to discern that he has arrived at the place that God told him about when he was supposed to leave Ur. He said, go to the land that I will show you.

Well, now, although it took a while, Abram has gotten there. God confirms that he's in the right place. He appears to him.

And he says, this is the land that I promised you. Abram builds an altar there and you get

the idea that this is the closest point of approach. This is the most intimate that God has ever been with Abram and vice versa.

But now, something is causing him to move away from there. God confirmed that that was the place, but he's leaving. How can he justify this in his mind? Well, it's rationalization.

There's nothing intrinsically wrong. I don't have a specific divine command. I'm going to journey to the south.

Thinking about the land as the goal, the place where your calling from God is fulfilled, there is a phase of our spiritual life where we recognize that call and respond to it. I think most of us have reached that point and have responded. That's why you all value the teaching of the Word of God.

That's why you study the Word of God and meditate on it. It makes enough of a difference to you that you have set aside the time to learn as much as we can learn from the Word of God. That is the means.

You've got to have something to put your faith in because this life is lived by faith. And this is where we get it. And that's great.

We've set ourselves on that road and we are seeking the place of fulfillment of God's call in our lives. I think that's true of all of us. This is what Abram has done and he's got himself on the road.

Once we arrive, once we recognize that calling and start pursuing it and get to the place where the presence of God says, this is where you're supposed to be. You're where you ought to be. You're doing what you ought to do.

God doesn't say, okay, you've made that decision. Let's all go home to heaven and start having the eternal future. The next thing that's going to happen is there's going to be a test of our resolution to remain in that place.

There's nothing more odious to the enemies of God. There's nothing more odious to Satan, if you will, than for believers to wake up and recognize their calling and move to that place, the place of blessing and the place of fellowship with God. And you can expect if we set our feet on that road, there is going to be opposition.

There is going to be testing. And most interestingly, God is going to allow and in some cases, even create that testing. Okay, you have separated out from the bulk of the people by putting your feet on that road.

Now, how much stick-to-itiveness do you have? Are you going to persist and sustain that priority and that understanding of life? Are you going to value the presence of God and

remain in that place? The testing is going to be more subtle. It's not going to be Satan knocking on the door and opening it up and saying, come with me and trying to drag you out of that place. It's going to come in more subtle fashion because it's a more sophisticated test.

As we grow and refine our sensibilities in the spiritual area, the testing gets more refined. This is what happens with Abram. He's passed the big test of leaving and coming.

Now, circumstances. And he gets distracted. He says, gosh, you know, the pasturage is getting thin.

I'm not sure there's enough water. I'm starting to get friction from the neighbors here. And so he starts journeying towards the south.

He says, well, you know, I'm still in the land. God outlined the borders of this place and I'm still in it. But I'm just going to drift down in this direction.

There's nothing intrinsically wrong with moving. There is not anything intrinsically wrong with leaving the land. Remember last time when we looked at the principle of the nation of Egypt, and we'll review that here in just a minute.

There are times when God says, don't be afraid to go down to Egypt. He's going to tell Jacob, go ahead and go. It's okay.

It's not that Abram moves. It's why he moves. It's the way that he makes that decision.

It's the process of decision making. Something has started to deteriorate in Abram's faith. And we're going to see it beginning in verse 10.

As he journeys toward the south, now there was a famine in the land. Who controls this sort of thing? Why is there a famine in the land? What produces a famine? We've just had a long period of drought here in Texas. The corn crops have been devastated.

Most of the other crops, you drive from one place to another in Texas and you see these brown, shriveled... Farmers have lost millions of dollars this year because the crops wouldn't grow. In the olden days, before you had a web of commerce and the great modern economy that we have, this would have created a famine because there's no crops. It's weather produced.

It's related to climate and weather. No rain, no crops. Excessive heat kills the crops.

You can bring your crops all the way to fruition and the day before you harvest them, they can cook on the stock and be rendered worthless. You can have a hailstorm and it beats them into the ground and they're worthless. You can have too much rain and they mold and are worthless.

These things are in God's hands, aren't they? How the weather goes. So if there's a famine in the land, who has initiated this famine? It's God. God has brought Abram to the land and now God has created a famine.

Why has God created a famine? Because Abram is in the land. This famine is a factor. It's a test for Abram.

What is Abram going to do about the famine? Abram is in the place where God appears to him. God communicates with Abram. Abram communicates with God.

He built an altar and called upon the name of the Lord, it says. God's talking to Abram. Abram's talking to God.

What a great arrangement. But the famine comes. We don't read, and Abram fell on his face before the Lord and said, O Lord, the goats and cattle, my servants, are in need.

You brought me to this place. I'm relying on You to sustain me in this place. That's what we don't read.

What do we read? There was a famine in the land and Abram went down to Egypt to dwell there. For the famine was severe in the land. This wasn't just a mild famine.

It was severe. So there's a circumstance that comes into Abram's life and as a result of this, after this great victory of faith, he abandons it. He leaves it.

It is as though he never came. The altar stands up there between Bethel and Ai. Untended.

Abram isn't there to sacrifice and to worship and to call upon the name of the Lord because Abram has left. What a tragic thing to have responded to the call of God and arrived in the place that God has called you to and then have a circumstance come up that causes you to leave it. This is something we want to be aware of in our own lives.

How did this happen? If we understand what happens in Abram's case, it's going to help us avoid making the same mistake. So it is a subtle thing. It's not a direct disobedience.

It's not a terrible fear. Abram doesn't necessarily panic. Abram makes decisions because he's a man of the world.

He's a man who has raised flocks and herds for years and he uses the conventional wisdom. You've got a famine in one place, you go to another. I've done this all my life.

Abram is unused to turning to God for the resolution of his daily problems. He got the big one right. Get up and leave and go to the land.

He says, well, you know, I'm kind of a migratory guy. I can do that. But now when a

problem comes up, he falls back on his conventional wisdom.

Got a famine? You leave. Head south. Go to a better climate.

Go to a better pasturage. And he doesn't apply his relationship with God and his call of God in his daily life. This is the threat to you and to me is that we don't remember who we are and why we're here in the daily things of life.

We think, well, there's no sin. There's no commandment being broken in traveling south. No sin, no commandment.

God never specifically said, go thou not to Egypt. So, it's an easy thing to rationalize and to say, well, this is what prudence dictates. This is what common sense and wisdom dictates.

I should take this course because this is what any thinking person would do in these circumstances. We do this ourselves and we shouldn't. The right answer is not necessarily what any thinking person would do.

The right answer is to go to God. What would God have me do? What consequence is there going to be to my relationship with God if I pursue this course? If Abram had stopped and thought, you know, God never appeared to me in Ur. God never appeared to me in Haran.

God appeared to me at Bethel. This is the place where God says He wants me to be. If there's a famine, I've got to stick in that place and find another answer to the pasturage and the water problem than leaving.

Now that I am a man living in response to the call of God, my thinking about what to do in a crisis has got to be different than before. There have to be new answers that reflect faith. If God brought me here, it's God's responsibility to sustain me here.

But Abram hasn't developed that thinking. And so he falls back on his old ways of thinking and he leaves. What happens? Verse 11, It came to pass when he was close to entering Egypt that he said to Sarai his wife, Indeed, I know that you are a woman of beautiful countenance.

Next time on your anniversary or your wife's birthday or whatever, all of us guys, this is the verse to write in the card. I know that you are a woman of beautiful countenance. Great Bible verse to send to your spouse.

But look at Abram's thinking now. Therefore, it will happen when the Egyptians see you that they will say this is his wife and they will kill me, but they will let you live. You can see the deterioration in Abram's thinking.

At first, he's just thinking, well, you know, pasturage, water, flocks, herds, servants, got

to move. But as his mind departs from God and the call of God and the provision of God, now he believes that he has got to take measures to preserve his own life, to keep from being killed. And he's starting to function out of fear.

He's decided to go to Egypt where God never told him to go and where he should not be going. And now that he's made that decision in heading to Egypt, he's going to have to lie. He's going to have to make decisions and engage in activities here that involve compromise that have nothing to do with God.

He doesn't say, well, I'm going to Egypt and there's a possibility of a threat to my life, so I better call on God and see if God will reassure me. God has said, I will make of thee a great nation. But Abram's not thinking about that promise.

Well, I guess I won't be killed because God said He's going to make of me a great nation. I haven't had any children yet. So, I'm bulletproof.

I'm not going to die because the promise of God has not yet been fulfilled. Abram is not taking what he knows, what God has said, the Word of God, and applying it to give himself peace and give himself confidence. If he was, A, he would have never left Bethel.

B, he wouldn't be afraid if he has to journey to Egypt. But you can see the erosion and the deterioration because Abram has forgotten who he is. Abraham has forgotten why he's there.

He's thinking in strictly circumstantial terms. I've got this circumstance I have to fix. Oh, now here's a new circumstance.

I've got to cope with it. I've got to come up with a plan. I have to have a solution.

What is going to happen here is a reflection of what happens to us when we let the same thing happen in our lives. You and I dwell in Beulah land when we remember who we are and why we're here. And we depart that when we forget.

Now, let me ask you something else. He says it will happen when the Egyptians see you. They will say this is his wife.

They will kill me, but they will let you live. Notice the focus here. Abram says they will kill me.

They won't kill you. He doesn't say, oh, by the way, they're going to take you into a foreign harem and make you their wife. You're going to be taken and made someone... He's not thinking so much about the consequences to Sarai as he is the consequences to himself.

The universe is starting to revolve now around Abram's life and Abram's security. He doesn't think... You know, we like to think that a husband would be self-sacrificial in

protection of his wife. I will die before I let them lay a hand on you.

There's a very graphic incident that took place up in Cook County in Oklahoma. It's been probably 20 or 25 years ago now, but it made the papers locally up near Tulsa. Cook County for years was notorious for high crime, high crime rate.

But there was a young man who was out on a date up there and went parking in a rural area. It was parked off in the trees there. And somebody came upon them and pulled a gun, forced them out of the car, and made the boyfriend sit while they began to have their way with the girl.

And the boyfriend managed to get away and escape, and he ran away. At his first opportunity, he ran away and abandoned the girl. She was raped and killed.

And it reminded us all at the time that you have to decide in your mind what your priorities are. Is it self-preservation, or is it your responsibility to someone? And even if you're in a dating relationship, if you're the male, you have a responsibility to the girl you're out with to protect her honor, to preserve her because of who she is. And she may be your future wife, she may be someone else's future wife.

But in any case, you have responsibility there for protection. Not just physical protection, but also moral protection. And to preserve someone's honor, to preserve their virginity, hopefully.