

99-03-28a

As we continue our worship this morning, turn with me to Psalm 51. Psalm 51. Even at this late stage of my life, relatively speaking, I always remember the first thing I learned in Sunday school about finding passages in the Bible that are in the Psalms, because there are 150 Psalms.

It's a relatively large book, and it happens to physically stand near the center of the Bible, unless you have a whole lot of helps in the back. So, when I was just maybe four years old and really just barely able to read, my Sunday school teacher said, Well, any time you need the Psalms, just open your Bible to the middle and you'll find it. And it has always worked.

Until I got this Bible that's, I would say, probably, how much is that? That's about nearly a third of this Bible is all helps in the back. So now when I turn to the center of my Bible, I actually wind up in Jonah. So, but normally you can find the Psalms right in the center.

But this today for our Scripture reading is going to be Psalm 51. We always try to remember the context of our study as we look at our Scripture reading, and we're in Genesis chapter 20, moving into chapter 21. We have seen after the episode of Lot's deliverance from Sodom, because of the grace of God and the intercession of his uncle Abraham, then in the chapter under our gaze this past week or two, we've seen Abraham go back and repeat a mistake he made when he was Abram, way back in chapter 12.

And that is, he leaves the place of promise. He leaves the place of blessing and the place where God appeared and spoke with him and ate a meal in his presence. He goes down and he makes an old mistake.

He lies about his relationship with Sarah. She is taken into a king's harem once again. And Abraham, after this great victory of faith and great honor that is done him by God, finds himself in an embarrassingly bad position.

He is put to shame by who first appears to be a pagan king, Abimelech the king of Gerar. And it reminds us, and we've begun to see in chapter 20, that the upshot of all this is that we can't really, and it's sort of a truism, I guess, that no one can really rest on their laurels. You can't assume that because you have made progress or because you have won a victory or because you have matured that you're immune or impervious to failure and attack, especially in your area of weakness.

And this is a place where we need to constantly be vigilant. And the key to successfully negotiating attacks on our area of weakness, for Abraham, it's physical fear. This is what got him in trouble when he went to Egypt.

He was afraid for his life, so he lied about Sarah. And he very nearly lost his life at the

hands of Sarah because of his attempts at self-preservation. And here, after all these years have gone by, he has done the same thing again.

And after speaking with God face to face, when he feels himself in danger, instead of looking to God and appealing to God, he resorts to his own devices. Well, I'll just use the old trick to fool these people and they won't kill me for my beautiful 99-year-old wife. Or 98-year-old, I guess, at this point.

But it's a reminder to us that we are never free from failure in this life, no matter how much progress we make. But there is always the opportunity to recover. And recovery isn't an effort that we make.

We don't redeem ourselves in the eyes of God. We don't earn our way back into God's favor. We can't.

We have nothing to bring to the table. We have no redeeming qualities. We have no effort that we can bring before God that is going to impress Him and justify ourselves in His sight.

We are justified in His sight by His grace and His mercy. What is required of us is we have to go to the throne of grace. We have to bring ourselves before God, acknowledge our transgressions, and receive forgiveness and cleansing from God.

We sometimes feel embarrassed to do so. We think, well, I'm going to wait a while. I'm sort of a self-imposed penance.

Well, I'm sure God doesn't want to see me right now. And, of course, this is all in our mind. All we're doing is wasting time, and we're excusing ourselves from responsibility.

Parents who have a child that malfunctions, do you really want to not know that something got flushed down the toilet and stopped it up? Do you not want to know that until later, or do you want to know it right away? Do you want to know that somebody was playing with matches in the back room and set something on fire right away, or do you want to wait? There is no justification for delaying coming to God. And this is one of the great principles that David learned in his life. And sometimes it takes an attention getter.

God had to send Nathan the prophet to him to tell a story about a poor man with a lamb that was taken advantage of by a rich and powerful man who took his only lamb and killed it. Even though he had great flocks and herds, he took the poor man's lamb, sacrificed it, and fed it to a visitor for a meal. And when Nathan told this story to David, this suddenly opened David's eyes to his failure and his sin in taking the wife of Uriah for his own.

When he could have his pick of the women of the land and really already had the wife

that God had designed for him. And he was, in a sense, sacrificing others to feed this visiting for an influence in his soul, which was his own lust. But this psalm, Psalm 51, is prefaced or is labeled at the beginning a psalm of David when Nathan the prophet went into him after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

And after the story, which we've studied in detail over in the books of Samuel, after he is confronted with his failure, now there's a choice. Once it is recognized and we understand that we have failed, whether through commission or omission, whether we did it in cognizance or ignorance, however it came about, we're now aware of where we stand before God and we have transgressed and it is a sin against God. The first thing we have to do is go to God.

That's what Psalm 51 is all about. It applies to our study in Genesis 20 and, of course, it applies each and every day of our lives. David says in Psalm 51, Have mercy upon me, O God, according to your lovingkindness, according to the multitude of your tender mercies.

Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions and my sin is always before me.

Against you, you only, have I sinned and done this evil in your sight, that you may be found just when you speak and blameless when you judge. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin my mother conceived me. Behold, you desire truth in the inward parts and in the hidden part you will make me to know wisdom.

Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones you have broken may rejoice.

Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence and do not take your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation and uphold me by your generous spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways and sinners shall be converted to you. Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, the God of my salvation, and my tongue shall sing aloud of your righteousness.

O Lord, open my lips and my mouth shall show forth your praise. For you do not desire sacrifice or else I would give it. You do not delight in burnt offering.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart. These, O God, you will not despise. Do good in your good pleasure to Zion.

Build the walls of Jerusalem. Then you shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering. Then they shall offer bulls on

your altar.

The wonderful principle, and we have visited this psalm several times in the past, but when you look at the end of it there, he says that God does not desire or delight in burnt offerings. That what he is looking at is what is going on in the heart. But you will notice that after the heart is made right, after it is purged and cleansed by the power of God, then they can offer the burnt offerings and the sacrifices.

Then they can offer bulls on the altar. And it is, by implication, acceptable in God's sight because now it is the expression of a contrite heart and a cleansed heart. So it isn't to say that the things that God commanded in the law as far as offerings and sacrifices have no value and should not be observed.

Rather, what it says is that these have to come from a heart that is right before God. And we often lose that priority. It is easy in our day to look around and see people actively implementing this sort of a view where if you feel like you need to be more right with God or that things are not going too well, well, let's get busy and do something that will please God.

Let's get out and minister to those who need ministry. Let's get out and get involved. Let's perform an act of some kind.

And this will rehabilitate us before God. Well, yes, I had this failure, but look at what I did over on the positive side. We find ourselves trying to balance the scale.

The scale is always down on the side of our failure and our sin. So we say, well, let me try to stack something over here and right the scale. Well, here you have a man who has committed adultery and murder, and he's going to recover.

He's going to be called a man after God's own heart. He's going to be the greatest king that Israel ever had. The Messiah, the Son of God, is going to take this man's name to himself.

He's going to be called the Son of David. That's what I call cleansing. That's what I call rehabilitation.

This man knows where the cleansing comes from. He knows how to be made right before God, and he tells us right here in this psalm. And it is not by trying to stack, Oh, Lord, let me go and build your temple.

Oh, Lord, let me slay the enemies of your people. Oh, Lord, let me build up the economy. Oh, Lord, let me fix the social ills in Israel.

He goes to the only source, the only place where that power exists, and that's God himself. We don't have anything to stack on the other side of that scale. It is the power

of God.

It's the grace and the mercy of God. What's the very first thing he says in this psalm? He appeals to the mercy of God. Have mercy on me, O God.

Our cleansing and our purification and our rehabilitation in the eyes of God and our renewal for service and for living the life that God has for us doesn't come by what we do. It comes by what God does. But we have to go and put ourselves in the place to receive it.

We have to have the attitude of heart that wants that. And when we go to God with that attitude that David reflects here, now God can cleanse. Now God can rehabilitate.

And our sacrifices and offerings, the things that we do that are important, that are a part of our responsibilities and our duty, will be pleasing in God's sight. Israel, for generations, observed the letter of the law with the sacrifices and the offerings and so forth. And God said, Your sacrifices are a stench in my nose.

Read the first couple of chapters of Malachi. Read the whole book. But especially in chapter 1 and chapter 2 of Malachi, the people are coming before God.

God is saying, You have profaned my altar. You've desecrated my sacrifices. You made a mockery of all of the things that I gave you in the law.

And they say, In what way have we done this? How have we offended? There was a blindness because they could not look in their own soul and acknowledge their failure. Measure themselves by the law of God and acknowledge shortcoming. And it's such a simple thing.

We can go to God anytime, anytime of the day, anytime of the night. And knowing what we know from the word of God, we know when we have failed. We have a conscience.

We have the Holy Spirit of God that convicts of sin and righteousness and judgment, God's evaluation. We know where we stand if we're willing to admit it and willing to go to God. And all it takes is a broken and contrite heart before God.

Coming before God and acknowledging like David does in verse 3. I acknowledge my transgressions. My sin is always before me. I know what I have done.

And Lord, I'm not making any fan dance here. I'm not justifying. I'm not rationalizing.

I'm not excusing. I'm not shifting blame to someone else. I failed.

I fell apart. You notice David never makes the argument, well, you know that Bathsheba, she was bathing up there on the roof and she should have had an umbrella. She should have had a tent going up there.

And if she hadn't have been, what kind of an idea is that to be up there naked on your rooftop anyway? That's where this whole thing started. I just lost my head, this beautiful woman. He says, I acknowledge my transgression.

I had no excuse. And that's what we have to do before God. And it's an amazing thing because that's the only thing that's required, a broken heart, a contrite spirit, coming before God and acknowledging where we have failed.

You look at the magnitude of what David has done. He's committed outright adultery, outright murder of the husband of this woman. But he knows.

He goes to God. He doesn't say, Lord, let me go out and cleanse my heart. Let me create a clean heart in myself.

Let me show you that I'm not really the bad person I appear to be at this moment. He says, Lord, create in me a clean heart. It's an act of creation.

It's an act out of Genesis chapter 1. For God to create in us a clean heart, to renew a right spirit within us. That's what God is capable of doing. We have that privilege any time we choose.

We can come before God any time of the day, any time of the night, and claim this wonderful act of cleansing, this great act of mercy and compassion on God's part. But we have to do it. If you turn back to Genesis chapter 20, fundamentally, any time we stray, any time we fail and start getting into the weeds beside the path of God's plan for our lives, this is the first thing we have forgotten.

We have forgotten the mercy and the compassion of God. And we immediately, what is the alternative? If you're not looking to God for His power, His forgiveness, His cleansing, where are we going to be looking? We're looking to ourselves. The classic categories of subjectivity, when we're subjective, we're not looking at life objectively.

We're not seeing reality for what it is. We're seeing it through a distorted, twisted point of view. And our eyes get on ourself, our eyes get on our circumstances, our eyes get on other people, always.

You can count on it. If you're in the midst of a failure, if you're about to fail, if you're looking back on a failure, you can see eyes on self, eyes on people, eyes on circumstances, rather than am I doing what I do heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men? Am I loving my neighbor, doing good to those who hate me, praying for those that despitefully use me? Or am I concerned with this is what happened to me? I've got to preserve myself. Why does Abraham leave the Oaks of Mamre? How many people can say, oh, God stopped by and we had a meal? How many people can say, I had a conversation with God, and He said, you know, I'm not going to hide what I'm about to do from you.

I'm going to tell you what I'm about to do. God's walking along the path. God Himself, the God of the universe, is walking down the path with Abraham.

He says, Abraham, I'm not going to hide from you what I'm about to do. This wicked city of Sodom, I'm going to destroy it. He gives Abraham the opportunity to have a conversation with Him and to make an appeal for any righteous individuals that may be in the city of Sodom.

Abraham persuades God, in a sense. He engages in intercession on behalf of his nephew Lot and his family. What an amazing status Abraham enjoys.

God says, I'm going to bless the entire world through you. You're going to have a son, even in your old age, and your descendants are going to be like the stars of heaven. They'll be like the sand of the seashore.

Countless for numbering. He has had all of these experiences with God, and yet, you look here in chapter 20, he goes right back and does the very same thing he did back in chapter 12. Turn back to chapter 12 of Genesis.

Look at verse 10. There was a famine in the land, and Abraham went down to Egypt to dwell there, for the famine was severe in the land. This is a circumstance, isn't it? This is how we typically start to fail.

We look around and some circumstance comes up. It may or may not involve people, but something will happen in our daily life, and it changes our priorities. We say, here's a crisis.

Here's a challenge. Here's an issue. Here's a problem.

What am I going to do? Because as soon as circumstances change, or as soon as people act in a way that isn't conducive to our plans and our goals and the way we think life ought to go, we are immediately tempted to get our eyes on ourselves. Oh, no. What's going to happen to me? Well, there's a famine in the land, and so Abraham says, I can't sustain myself here.

I've got to leave. I've got to go someplace where there's food. How many times in the Bible, of course Abraham doesn't have the Old Testament at this time, but can God sustain? Can God provide for people in time of famine? God's going to sustain Abraham's descendants out there in the wilderness for 40 years with virtually no visible means of support.

The manna is going to fall. He can bring quail in. He can do all of these different things to provide.

Jesus will demonstrate this same thing to the disciples when they fish all night and find

nothing. He says, let down the net on the other side. There's all the fish and more that they could possibly require.

The feeding of the 5,000. The feeding of the 4,000. Jesus is going to talk about not worrying about your circumstances when you get over to the Sermon on the Mount in chapter 5 of Matthew.

But Abraham, of course, Genesis is the book of first things, and this is one of the first famines that anybody's had to deal with. Abraham should know by simply applying the promise of God. If God says, I'm going to make you a great nation, you're going to have descendants, and he doesn't have them yet, well, he can't die, can he? Abraham can say, well, I'm obviously not going to starve to death because if I starve to death, I can't have any offspring.

So God, how are you going to sustain me? He can go to God and find out how this is going to take place. If he keeps his eyes on God, keeps his mind on the promise, that will keep him objective. But he sees the famine, knee-jerk response, no food, got to leave.

He heads south, and south to the land of Egypt. Egypt is the picture throughout the Bible of bondage to sin. It is the picture of unbelief, no salvation, the place that is destroyed by God because it will not respond.

Egypt as a nation had the Israelites there, the people who were the custodians of the things of God, for 400 years, and they didn't convert as a people. There was a minority, there were some Egyptians that left with Israel when they went out of the land, but Egypt as a nation, its leadership, its institutions, the vast majority of its population, were exposed to that and didn't respond. And they're judged.

The ten plagues are a judgment on Egypt for not responding. They have the people of God there, and instead of honoring them, instead of taking the things of God and learning from them, they enslave the people. They put them to work making bricks.

They've got the means of eternal salvation in front of them, and instead they use them to build buildings that will eventually perish. So they are responsible, they're accountable, and they're judged by God. The people of Sodom, the people in the land, come in contact with Abram.

Abram delivers them from slavery. When the kings of the north, the coalition comes down and captures them, Abraham comes and delivers them and frees them, defeats these guys with a very small force, frees them up, gives them all their stuff back, sends them home. They don't say, What God is it that you serve that gave you this great victory? You're an honorable man, you won't let us give you anything.

What is it about you that's different? Where can we find out about this God? They had that opportunity, they don't even care. All the people of Sodom that got carried into

slavery are the same ones that are going to get fire and brimstone rained down on them just a few years later because they had the opportunity, and they did not seize it. These are not people that never had a chance, that were predestined to destruction, vessels of wrath ordained to destruction.

People love to go over and pull that out of Romans. These are people that had the chance, that have seen what God can do, have been around a man of God, have been around men of God, lots still living among them down there. They don't care a thing about it.

How much worse for the people of God, who have had the word of God, in this case personally delivered by God, to forget and to fall apart. But that's Abraham's problem. So he goes down to Egypt.

He heads south to Egypt. And when he gets to Egypt, you find out what's on his mind. What is his thinking? Why is he heading out of the land of promise? He's made this big trip, it took him years to go up through, from Ur of the Chaldees, and come down to the land of promise.

And he builds an altar, and he worships God, and God appears to him there, and confirms the promises to him. And he leaves. He bugs out.

God tells him, here's the scope of the land. Abraham, he leaves it. He goes south.

So Abraham goes down, and now we find out what his thinking is like, in chapter 12, 11. He says to Sarai, his wife, Indeed, I know that you are a woman of beautiful countenance. Butters her up a little bit.

All women are immediately favorably disposed, if you start with compliments. But usually, when people start this buttering up process, there's a request coming right after. Therefore, it will happen, when the Egyptians see you, they will say, this is his wife, and they will kill me, but they will let you live.

So do something for me. Say that you are my sister, so that it will be well with me for your sake. Look at how many times the first personal pronoun crops up here.

I know that you are a woman of beautiful countenance. It will happen when they see you, they will say, this is his wife, they will kill me, and they will let you live. Please say you are my sister, that it may be well with me for your sake, and that I may live because of you.

So you get this, eyes on circumstances, eyes on people, eyes on self. Has he prayed? Has he gone to God? God, there's a famine. Lord, I've got to head south and get food.

Will you preserve me? You've made me this promise that I'm going to be the father of

many nations, but if I go down here and get killed, that can't happen. He's not even thinking in those terms. God is no longer real to him.

His circumstances are real to him. His personal danger is real to him. And he will manipulate his wife.

He will put his wife in physical danger by saying that she's his sister. She doesn't have the protection of a marriage status, and she's susceptible to being somebody can say, hey, beautiful gal. The very thing that he's talking about here, he says, they may kill me.

He doesn't say, Sarah, we're going into this place and it could be dangerous. They may take you into their harem. He's not worried about her.

He's worried about himself. And how would you like to have your flaws and your failures recorded in eternal Scripture for everybody to gaze at generation after generation? This has to be embarrassing for Abraham on one level, that this is kind of a cowardly, dishonorable portion of his life. But he grows out of this.

We know that plagues come on the people in Egypt as soon as the Pharaoh takes Sarah into his harem. And we'll be back here in chapter 12 as we finish up chapter 20. But you see what Abraham's thinking.

His loss of focus. He's forgotten who he is. He's forgotten his place in God's plan.

And this leaves him wide open to every kind of failure. As soon as we forget who we are and why we're here, we're going to fail. It's a failure in the soul.

That's why rehabilitation takes place in the soul. The things that we do reflect what's going on in the heart. So the heart is the place of failure.

The heart is the place of rehabilitation. And it's the power of God and the grace of God that, A, can keep us from falling if we focus on it. But the word of God is alive and powerful.

It is a critic of the thoughts and intents of the heart. If we keep the word of God circulating in our thinking and in our soul, we won't make these kinds of mistakes. It won't let us get subjective and think that we are at the center of the universe and it all depends on what happens to us.

There's a principle that we see reflected in the comparison of these two chapters. The plan of God for you and for me is not circumstances. It's the soul.

This is the thing that our church has missed. This is the thing that corporately, as the body of Christ in this age, we have forgotten. We think that the plan of God is circumstances.

Can we get everybody evangelized by the year 2000? Can we meet physical needs? Can we provide support and ministry? Can we build a building? Can we enlarge the building? Can we fill the stadium? Can we make an impact on people? We think it's circumstances. The plan of God is not circumstances. It's the soul.

When your soul is right, it doesn't matter what your circumstances are. This is what has happened when we start thinking about divine guidance. All of us, I think, at one time or another thought, well, I wish I could find out from God what I should be doing.

We took this up in a study. One of our first studies here in Dallas recently was on the topic of divine guidance. How can I know the will of God? When we come to that subject, we think it would be great, and we don't like to think of it in these terms, but this is what it boils down to.

We think, wouldn't it be great if God could sort of give us a crystal ball? So that when it comes time to make a decision, should I buy this house? Should I marry this person? Should I go to this school or that school? How should I proceed? I've got some important life impact type decisions here to make. Which one is the right one? We're not necessarily trying to just be selfish and fearful, but we want to do the right thing. We want to have things turn out for the best.

But we always tend to think in terms of circumstances. We think, if I make the wrong choice here, this may be irreversible. If I marry the wrong person, if I go to the wrong school, if I go into the military instead of going to school, if I go to school instead of going into the military, if I invest all of my savings in this one thing or in another, there's no going back.

This is an irreversible, and once I'm on that path, what if it's not the will of God? Now I'm off the track of the will of God, and I'll never again be able to get back on it. And so we think, we just unconsciously start thinking of the plan of God as this set of circumstances. And at each juncture, each decision point, we think, well now, am I going to stay on the circumstance path or not? If I get off, the fork in the road, the road less traveled and all that, you come to the, like they always say, if you come to a fork in the road, take it.

Well, we're going to go one way or the other, and we're probably not going to be able to reverse course. The plan of God is not circumstances. It's your soul.

You think about Joseph. He's probably sitting there in prison after his brothers sell him into slavery, and he's thinking, you know, I had a choice. I didn't have to tell him about that dream with the sheaves and the sun and the moon and the stars bowing down and that, you know, what possessed me? I made a mistake.

I wasn't sensitive. I wasn't caring enough about my brothers. I offended them.

I must have spoken wrongly, and now I'm in prison. What about my inheritance, my share of my father's? I'm away from my father, and those brothers don't care anything about him. I'm not there to look out for him.

I made this mistake. I'm in prison in Egypt. I'm a slave.

It's over. I diverted off the path of God's plan. I'm never going to get back.

Well, we know how the story of Joseph turns out, and God works all things together for good. Why? Because the issue is not the all things. God can change circumstances in a flash.

The Bible is replete with examples of God coming down against people's expectations and radically changing circumstances. You think one thing is going to happen, and God says, no, it's not. Sometimes it may take a miracle.

Sometimes it may take intervention on the part of others, but God prevents certain things and circumstances. He causes certain things. Circumstances are no problem to God.

It's like moving rocks around on the ground. You can move a rock anytime you want. Circumstances are not an issue for God.

The issue in history and the issue in God's plan is souls, because God will not go in with His finger and push your soul around. He has given us accountability and responsibility for our souls. The amazing thing about God's plan is not that He brings all the prophecies to pass in human history, and that He works things around so that what He has predicted is going to come to pass.

That's finger work. It's a great thing to go lift these passages up. I don't have them at my mental fingertips, but there is a place or two in Scripture where it talks about the creation of the universe as the finger work of God.

God used His finger to write the Law of Moses. God used His fingers to create the universe. That's no problem.

God can make history come out fine, but as far as your soul and my soul being transformed and having our minds renewed and coming to the place of being a good and faithful servant and being pleasing and living the worthy life before God, this is deliverance. This is salvation. The Bible describes this as arm work.

Our deliverance and salvation takes the arm of God. He can run the entire universe with His fingers, but when it comes to getting us to a position of being saved, God has to use His whole arm. That's how hard it is, relatively speaking, for God.

It's because our decider is involved. Our chooser is involved. And we are so easily

distracted.

We're so easily deflected. And it doesn't matter how far down the road we think we are. Look at Abraham.

You see what he did back here in his early days, right after he gets to the land. You say, well, he's kind of new to this whole plan of God thing. He's just left Ur of the Chaldees.

He's just come into the land, built an altar, worshiped. A famine came. Well, it's forgivable.

He's kind of new at this. And he hasn't had the smoking pot and the burning torch experience. He hasn't had the conversation with God experience.

He hasn't grown in the faith. Well, you get over here to Genesis chapter 20. Now he has had all those things.

He's had the visitation from God that we studied in chapter 18 and so on. But after all of these things, after he pleads righteousness before God and succeeds in getting God to agree that if they are righteous in the city, it will not be destroyed and on account of Abraham, Lot is delivered. It says God remembered Abraham when he delivered Lot.

Then in chapter 20, verse 1, Abraham journeyed from there to the south. He's heading back south from the Mamre area. That's toward Egypt.

He's heading back in the same direction he did eight chapters ago. And we have an abbreviated account because you can just go back and fill in the blanks from chapter 12. In verse 2, Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister.

What prompts this? What is his thinking? We don't have near as much insight into it here as we do in chapter 12, but we get the idea it's the same thing. He's fearful. We don't even know why he's leaving the oak trees of Mamre.

But he's leaving. He's heading south. God said, I will come around here this time next year and Sarah will have a son.

God said it twice. He said it in chapter 17. He said in a year, Sarah will have a son.

He says it again in chapter 18 when he's sitting in front of the tent flap. This time next year, Sarah will have a son. I will return.

I will visit Sarah about this time and she will have a son. Well, why would you leave the place where God says, I'm going to visit? Do you remember that? Look back in chapter 17 when he's talking about the fate for the various ones. He says, As for you, as for Sarah, as for Ishmael, look at verse 21 of chapter 17.

My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year. This set time next year. Isaac is going to be born.

You will have a son. If you have God speaking directly to you and making a promise to you, what more do you want? You look in chapter 18 when he says in verse 10, I will certainly return to you. And in the New King James it says, according to the time of life.

But it's basically the same statement that he made in 17. This time next year. And behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son.

He says, I will certainly return to you. You get the idea? You're here. I've come to you here.

You wait a year. I'll come back to you here. You're going to have a son.

What does this tell us in chapter 20? Abraham is not focused on the promise of God. He's not thinking about the word of God. Whatever it is that motivates him to leave, and it doesn't really matter what it is.

Whatever it is, it's not the word of God that says, I will return to you this time next year and you're going to have a son. If he's going to have a son in a year, that means Sarah's going to be getting pregnant here pretty quick. You've got a nine month gestation period for human babies.

So why is he leaving? What's on his mind? Whatever it is, it is not the word of God. This is where we fail. He's got his eyes on himself.

He's got his eyes on people. He's got his eyes on circumstances. And he goes to Gerar.

He doesn't go back to Egypt, thank goodness, but this time he goes to Gerar. And he does the very same thing he did eight chapters ago. Say, he says to them, she is my sister.

So Abimelech, the king of Gerar, sent and took Sarah. Now, this ought to wake Abraham up. Because when he was Abraham, back in chapter 12, the king sent and took his wife, and bad things happened.

Plagues happened. He got driven out of the land. It was a bad deal.

He recognized that that should not have happened. As soon as the messengers come from the king, he says, Sarah, pack your stuff. You're going to the king's harem.

What's Abraham thinking? What's going on in his mind? Is he not having any kind of déjà vu? Is he not thinking, boy, we nearly got killed for this down in Egypt ten or twelve years ago. Where is his mind? But there is a kind of blindness that sets in. He can't even properly interpret or react in his circumstances.

He can't make good decisions because his soul, which is the soul of a believer, and is built to run. It's kind of like engines. Your car engine is built to run on a certain kind of fuel.

I used to have an Isuzu that was a diesel. It's built to run on diesel fuel. Most cars are built to run on gasoline.

My car doesn't run on gasoline. It runs on diesel. Well, two times in its long history with me, before I got rid of it, it got filled up with gasoline.

That car doesn't run on gasoline. It runs on diesel. And if you try to drive a diesel on gasoline, you can destroy the engine.

Fortunately, the realization hit before the car went down the road. And in both cases, the thing, after a period of hours, the tank was drained and it was filled up with diesel, and then it ran okay. We are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our soul and our thinking, our minds and our souls are built to run on the Word of God. We are a new creation. Old things are passed away.

We're not a gasoline engine anymore. We're a diesel. We're supposed to run on a different kind of fuel.

And if we try to run on human viewpoint, if we try to act according to the principles of the world, if we get into this self-preserving, self-centered, pre-Copernican universe, you know, before Copernicus, they thought the entire universe, all the stars and everything, revolved around the earth. That's the old view. That's the way the world, people who are not saved, who don't care anything about God, that's how they live their lives.

It all depends on me. Look at society. All of the special interest groups and all the people out there.

I saw a lady, and bless her heart, she's a wonderful lady that was a pilot back in the 50s. And she wanted to get into the space program. But back then, the space program was only for men.

And she did all kinds of wonderful things and was probably a great pilot. But, you know, you've got to look around and figure out, this isn't going to happen. But now she's, what, she's 67 or she's pushing 70, and it's 40 years later, and she's still trying to get into the space program.

She's hoping, well, they sent John Glenn, maybe they'll send me. But this is what she wants to do. She's focused on it, and that's her whole thing.

Well, I have no idea where this lady stands with the Lord, but it's just an illustration. People get an idea. This is what I want to do.

I'm going to keep butting my head on this wall until it gives, and I get to do what I want to do. I'm a girl, and I want to go to the Citadel, and the fact that it's an all-male school is not going to deter me. I'll get lawyers.

I'll keep bashing and bashing and bashing until they make this a school that will let me in. This is our preoccupation, or at least it's a suggested example of preoccupation with circumstances. I have to get my fulfillment from my circumstances.

I'm going to make this circumstance the way I want it to be, and then I'll be happy, and I'll get what I want out of life. This is the way we think. This is the way we're built when we come out of the womb.

This is fallen human nature. God, and praise God that He does this, when we're saved and we're delivered, not only from the lake of fire, but delivered out of this present evil age, God gives us something new to think about besides ourselves. He gives us something to rely on for our happiness and our fulfillment besides our circumstances.

We're no longer enslaved by our circumstances. We no longer have to depend on what happens for our happiness and our fulfillment because the plan of God is not circumstances. It's the soul, and it doesn't matter what your circumstances are.

Your soul can be fed. Your soul can be filled. Your soul can be blessed.

Your soul can grow and bear fruit. Your soul can take an eternal weight of glory forward throughout this life and into the next. And we're freed.

It's just like the children of Israel coming out of bondage in Egypt. We're set free. Why go back into that slavery? Why do what Abraham does and go back into bondage? Go back into living by fear.

Go back into trying to live by our wits and trying to second guess and trying to predict the future on our own and figure out how can I make sure I bob to the top? God has delivered us from that. Why do we abandon our deliverance and we walk willingly and say, put those cuffs back on me. Chain me back to that big iron ball.

Set me down on the old galley seat and let me row that oar and let me try to pull myself along. This is what we do. This is what we give up when we make this failure.

And Abraham, after all these years and all these wonderful experiences with God, and we sometimes think, well, you know, God hasn't made himself real enough to me. If I could have a vision, if God would come and eat a meal with me like he did with Abraham, I'd be set for life. I'd never fail again.

Well, other people have had that experience. You look at the Israelites, had the pillar of cloud, the pillar of fire, saw Cecil B. DeMille and the parting of the Red Sea, saw the

miracles of God, they saw the dead raised, they saw things that we read about and we can't even get special effects to do justice to in our movies. And they still failed.

Abraham walked with God. Abraham served a meal to the Lord God. Abraham had a conversation in person, face-to-face with the Lord God.

And look at him in chapter 20. He goes in and he's back to his old ways. How can that happen? We don't want that to happen to us.

How can we keep that from happening? Well, where did Abraham fail? Abraham took his eyes off the promise. There's a promise from God. There's a plan from God.

God says, look, I'm coming back this time next year. I'm going to visit your wife. I'm going to fulfill these promises I've been talking about with you for eight chapters.

So, don't lose focus. Don't forget who you are. Don't forget why you're here.

Don't forget what I've told you about where you fit into the plan. It's a failure in the soul. And it isn't where Abraham is that gets him out of the plan of God.

It isn't what happens in Abraham's circumstances that get him out of the will of God. It's when his decider goes haywire. When he starts choosing based on the old, he's starting to try to run his engine on gasoline again.

And it's not going to work. Our souls are built to run on the Word of God. We are a new creation.

And we're only going to destroy ourselves and others when we try to run on the old fuel. It's going to be worse for us. You find these passages in the Bible.

We've seen some of them in the New Testament. It would be better for that man if he had not known the way of truth than having come to it to go back. Why? Because you've done the conversion.

They do this on air conditioning systems and things. Now, if you want to spend the money, you can take your car in. If it runs on the old coolant, Freon or whatever it is, well, now that's illegal because it's wrecking the ozone layer, quote unquote.

So we can't have that anymore. We can't have the cheap stuff that you can put in yourself for \$6 a can. Now you've got to go down and pay \$120 and have somebody else put in some fancy new stuff.

Well, you can get your air conditioner converted over to run on this new coolant so that it's getting harder and harder for older cars to even get their air conditioners charged up because of all these, in my opinion, worthless regulations. But the point is, once you convert over, you can't go back. You can't go take a can of Freon and say, well, I've got

my brand new 98 Oldsmobile custom cruiser out here.

I don't, but if I did, I've got, what is it? An 87 Oldsmobile custom cruiser and it's a wonderful car. But I can't take it down and get the new stuff put in. And if you have a new air conditioner, you can't get the old stuff.

They're just mutually exclusive. There are some things you just can't do. Our souls are not built to run on human viewpoint anymore.

And we destroy ourselves and we hurt others. And this is what Abraham's doing. We don't want this to happen.

How do we stop it? We've got to remember what our focus is. We've got to keep our attention riveted on the new fuel. And that's the word of God.

That's our nourishment. That's our manna. That's what gives us the ability to think objectively and to be pleasing to God.

And when we please God, our circumstances will take care of themselves. Let's pause here and take a break. When we come back, we'll try to finish chapter 20.