

PURSUING OUR POSSESSIONS IN CHRIST IN 2012

Scripture Reading – Genesis 12:1-9.

Introduction

The Lord had said to Abram, leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you." When God came to Abram at this point in his life it was the first recorded time God had spoken to any one since Noah." (Boice) God was calling him to a new land, to a land which was God's promise to Him. He reached Canaan the land of God's promise and he lived there. He lived as an alien in the land and he had to be patient because God had promised the land to him. That is another story and another sermon. But let me emphasize that He reached Canaan by faith. (See Genesis 12:5) This is the land that would ultimately be possessed by the Israelites and Abraham was included in the promise made to them in Genesis 13:14-15. God said to Abraham "Lift your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring." The challenge with which we are confronted in this passage of scripture, lies in Abram's implicit trust and strong faith in the God who had called him into the unknown. He persistently pursued the call until he reached the land of promise. His total unreserved faith and unquestioning obedience to God is the challenge I want us to look at as we move into the year 2012. As we stand on the threshold of a New Year with its uncertainties and insecurities, the question arises "are we pursuing God's inheritance for us which is a spiritual Canaan – the land of holiness and the victorious life?" It is not God's intention for us to scratch the surface of Grace. His intention is that we dig deep into the well of His power and provision for living a holy life. Too many are skating on the surface of grace and taking a casual stroll through time hoping for the best at the end of it all? If Abram had lived by this mindset he would have never reached the "Land of Promise." Jesus said it is those who hunger and thirst after righteousness who will be filled. Matthew 5:6. The central idea in these words is that there must be an intense longing and persistent pursuit of the life of righteousness and holiness, if we are to know the fullness of the blessing of the gospel. This is achieved by a determined faith.

At the end of his life Paul testified “I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.” 2 Timothy 4:7. Paul made clear that life’s journey was not a casual stroll through time. He uses words like “fighting,” “finishing” and “keeping the faith.” A saint in a church of which I was pastor said to me on one occasion, “Pastor I can’t let the trivial bother me or fuss about non-essentials, because at my age I am putting all my energies into preparing for heaven and facing God one day.” From what I know of her she had been doing that of all of her life. The issue with her is not her aging, but her readiness to meet God one day. Are we pursuing the holy inheritance that God has given to us? Have we committed ourselves to values and priorities that fit us for life and which qualify us to hear the Master’s commendation one day, “well done you good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord.” The important question is “are we growing in grace, Christ likeness and holiness as we walk the pathway of life?” The Apostle Paul constantly and consistently focused on the spiritual values and qualities in the Christians. He frequently urged the Christians to live worthy of the gospel which they had received in and through Christ. And to do this requires a full surrender to Lordship of Christ, obedience to the will of the Holy Spirit, and consecration to the purposes of God. Jesus “died to make men holy. He died to make them good.” He has provided power to live the life of holiness in our world and the means to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ. This is the passion of the heart of God. Let us make this the focus of life and the passion of our hearts in the year 2012. It is important that we determine this year to pursue this goal.

We read a significant passage of scripture, describes God’s Abram’s encounter with God and His call and challenge to Abraham to leave his country and move into the unknown with God. He was to go to a country that he had never visited. Significantly it was the land of Canaan. This land was to be the inheritance of God’s people in the purposes of God for them. And God called him to it.

In the Old Testament there are types, symbols and shadows which speak to spiritual realities. The land of Canaan was known as the land of Canaan Rest. It is descriptive of the life of holiness. It is a rest which belongs to the people of God. One has written well that “when we are called to trust with the kind of faith that

turns us from our own way to obedience, it is then that Jesus by cleansing our hearts brings us into this rest of a deep fellowship with God, the promised land of His presence which is the holy place.” When we yield our own way completely to God’s way, we will enjoy the depths and riches of this rest. The challenge is to trust in His power to deliver us from sin and make us holy. This is our inheritance. It is the land of a spiritual Canaan.

There is much that can be applied to our lives as we look at Abram’s call to a geographical Canaan. It was a critical moment in the life of Abraham, and there are some useful guidelines in this incident that will help us in our pursuit and desire to live a holy life which is our inheritance.

What then are some fundamental guidelines which are the secret of possessing our inheritance and living the life of holiness? These guidelines are revealed in Abram’s response to the call and commission of God on his life.

First of all there was,

a. God’s clear call to commitment. The Lord said to “Abram, “leave your country, your people, and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.”

Genesis 12:1. This was a call to total commitment. This is an essential step growth in grace and holiness. Then there was,

b. God’s precious promise to Abram of blessing and fruitfulness. Genesis 12:2. “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you. I will make you great and you will be a blessing.” There was also,

c. God’s priceless pledge to give Abram the land of Canaan. Genesis 12:7. “.....go to the land I will show you.” Abram’s encounter with God was clearly designed to take him into the future with confidence, but also to accomplish God’s purposes for his life and through him to the world. A study of Abram’s response to the call of God upon his life will reveal that if he was to make progress in the will of God and claim his inheritance - the land of Canaan- there were specific principles by which he would have to operate. They were guiding lights that would take him through some dark and difficult circumstances. It is

clear however, that they were necessary to Abram' achieving God's purposes for his life. There is no doubt that we can learn from Abram and his response to God's call to possess a new land.

If we are to grow and achieve spiritually and pursue our inheritance this coming year, then we must discover from Abram what this spiritual achievement is founded on. NOTICE THAT IT IS ROOTED IN

1. AN OBJECTIVE DIVINELY DEFINED. Genesis 12: 1- 5. "The Lord commanded Abram to go into the land that he would show him." God chose Abram's destiny. God selected what Abram would do in life. The writer to the Hebrews tells us that Abram, "when called to go to a place, he would later receive his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going."

Now if Abram did not know where he was going, what was his objective? For Abram it was not a question of the place of God's choice for him, but of what God's will was for him regardless of the place. The place did not matter to Abram. God's will is what mattered. What was supremely important to him was not only the divinely chosen place, but the Divine will. At this stage of his life he did not know where God wanted him. What He was most concerned with was to listen to God's voice and do God's will. God had chosen the place and all Abram had to do was follow the leadership of God, and he would eventually arrive at the divinely chosen place. I have a plaque on my dresser which was given to me in one of my pastorates. It reads "The man who walks with God always get to his destination." This was the secret of reaching his goal and claiming his inheritance. " Now what was required for Abram to reach his destination?" There are two principles that emerge here. First of all,

a. A Specific Priority was established. Genesis 12:1, 4. God said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you." In verse 4 "Abram left as the Lord told him to." Abram was clear on what God wanted him to do and it was a serious move to make. "Leave your country....leave your people....leave your father's household and go to the land I will show you." This was both a call and a challenge to Abram. It was a call to a

divine priority. You will observe that two factors come into play in order for him to fulfill what God had called him to do.

i. After God had called him to go to this new land; he was faced with a radical choice. To do this he would have to establish a new priority in his life. That priority was to obey God's Call and commission. The second factor is this,

ii. After establishing this priority, he acted on it. Genesis 12:4. "So Abram left as the Lord told him to do." This was more than a New Year's resolution. He took action on his decision. When Charles Hummell was going into the ministry, a businessman gave him an excellent piece of advice. "Be careful that the urgent doesn't crowd out the important." Set down your priorities in life and don't let the urgent crowd out those priorities. The second element that Abram needed in order to reach God's chosen place for him was

b. A singular Purpose to fulfill God's Will for his life. Genesis 12:4. "Abram left as the Lord had told him." What he gave up is an indication that there was an intense and singular passionate determination in Abram to do God's will and doing so trust Him who had called him. It is evident from Abram's response that when the purpose is established and the priorities settled, the next step is to passionately pursue them. Abram left as the Lord had called him. Abram gave up the good, to pursue the excellent. He relinquished the legitimate to follow after the superior and he did it with a fervent passion to achieve God's had planned for him.

Here is a question for the New Year "What is your passion as a Christian" Surely it should be a passion for God and holy living. God is holy and has called us to holiness. His will is our sanctification. His command is to be holy as He is holy. 1 Peter 1:16. Paul tells us that God chose us in him to be holy and blameless in his sight." Ephesians 1:4. This is our inheritance! God challenges us to this Divinely defined objective. God's objective for Abram was clearly defined. Furthermore,

2. HIS OBJECTIVE WAS DIVINELY CHOSEN. Genesis. 12:1. The Lord said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people, your father's household and go to the land I will show you." Abram did not choose his future. He did not choose his

objective in life. He chose what God had for him. His objective was divinely chosen. God commanded him to go into the known and the goal was established by God. God had a place and a plan for Abram's life. It was set out for Abram, but if that plan was to work out for him, he would have to place himself in God's hands and under God's sovereign will. God's purpose for his life would have to become his purpose. The writer to the Hebrews declares, "By faith Abraham when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went." While heaven is included in that inheritance, Canaan is described as the promise of his inheritance. Canaan was,

a. A Specific Destination. Genesis 12:1. The land God promised him was Canaan. Canaan in the scriptures is type of the life of holiness. It cannot be a type of heaven for there are too many giants and battles in the land. The life of holiness is the inheritance to which God has called His people. Paul writing to the church in Colosse writes, "Giving thanks to the Father who had qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the Kingdom of light. For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of the Son he loves." Colossians 1:12. Barclay tells us, Paul is saying that

i. God has given to the Colossians a share in the inheritance of God's dedicated people." This passage of scripture ties in with that passage in Paul's speech before Agrippa, when He told him of the work God had given him. What was that task? "To open their eyes, and turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive the forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me." Acts 26:18. Barclay points out that the first privilege is that there has been given to the Gentiles a share in the inheritance of the Jews. The Jews had always been God's chosen people – the unique and special possession of God. But Jesus came and opened the door to the Gentiles and to all men. Not only to the Jews but men and women of all nations. But Paul informs that

ii. God has brought us into the Kingdom of the Son He loves. The Greek word for "brought us," has a special use. In the ancient world, when one empire won a victory over another, it was the custom to take the population and the defeated country and to transfer them lock, stock and barrel to some other land. This was

the custom in the ancient world. So Paul says that God has transferred the Christian from the kingdom of darkness or the dominion of death into His own Kingdom and under His authority. This transference meant rescue. It meant four great things. It meant,

A. A transference from darkness to light. Colossians 1:12. In and through the Lord Jesus Christ, “God has given us light to live by and to die by.” It is His light that dispels the darkness. It also meant,

B. The transference from slavery to freedom. Colossians 1:12. It is redemption, and that is the word used for the buying back of something which was in the power and under the authority of someone else. Without God men and women are slaves to sin and the fear of death. But Jesus stepped into man’s predicament and died on a cross to purchase our redemption. By His death and resurrection we can sing with Charles Wesley “my Chains fell off, my heart was free I arose went forth and followed thee.” We have been rescued from slavery of sin and brought into freedom which belongs to the children of God.. There is another meaning here which is,

C. The Transference from Condemnation to Forgiveness. Man in his sin deserves nothing but the condemnation of God; but through the sacrifice of Jesus on the old rugged Cross and because He shed his Blood for us, man can personally discover and receive the mercy and the grace of God’s forgiveness. And so he can know that he is no longer a condemned sinner at God’s judgment seat, but stands guiltless because of the power of God’s mercy and grace. But there is still more in the meaning of this word.

D. It means transference from the power of Satan to the power of God. Jesus breaks the power of sin and sets the prisoner free. “If the Son shall make you free you will free indeed.” He snaps the chains of sin. Just as an earthly conqueror transferred the citizens of the land he had conquered into a new kingdom and a new land, so God in His triumphant love transfers men and women from the realm of sin and darkness into the realm of holiness and love. This inheritance is both a possession and a pursuit. We possess it and yet there is still much land to be possessed. It is a gift of God but we must pursue holy

living with all the energy of our souls in the power of the Holy Spirit. The scriptures teach that God the Holy Spirit purifies us that is His gift. But it is also a growth. The scriptures teach us that as we walk according to the Holy Spirit's will and leadership, He keeps on cleansing our heart from sin. Maturity is the fruit of our obedient walk with Him. Holiness is our inheritance which should always be our goal and we can possess it. Note that God gives

b. Explicit Instructions. Genesis 12:1. The Lord said to Abram "leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you." The basic instruction to Abram is unmistakably clear. In essence he said "I have chosen a land for you and your family now cut your ties with the past and move to the objective I have selected for you. This is your inheritance, now go and possess it; it is yours for the taking." In the context in which we are considering what God's promise of inheritance to Abram means for us, the instruction of God is clear and unmistakable. "...make every effort to live in peace with all men; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God." Hebrews 12:14-15. Paul writes that "God chose us in Christ before the creation of the world that we should be holy and blameless in His sight." Ephesians 1:4, and again Paul tells us that "Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy..." God's primary objective for men and women is that they be holy. That is the purpose and focus of the death of Jesus. Peter quoting the Old Testament wrote, "So just as He who called you is holy so be holy in all that you do, for it is written "Be holy because I am holy." 1 Peter 1:15-16. God called Abram into the unknown. It was an objective Divinely chosen. Canaan was the inheritance that God promised His people. The Abram story reveals that,

3. THE OBJECTIVE WAS SUCCESSFULLY ACHIEVED. Genesis 12:1-5

The word says that "they set out for Canaan and they arrived there." How did they successfully complete their journey? There were three fundamental actions that Abram took which led them to God's chosen objective for them. There was,

a. The Act of Renunciation. Genesis 12:1. God said to Abram "Leave your country, your people and your father's household....." There was nothing

illegitimate about his country, his people and his father's household, but Abram was faced with a hard choice. There was price to pay and a cost to count. We have already seen that Abram had settled on what his priorities would be. He had selected to go God's way no matter what it cost him. He chose to cut the ties with those things which would hinder him from going God's way and fulfilling God's purposes for his destiny. He cut his ties with the good, to achieve the excellent. He severed his relationship with the ordinary, in order to reach the extraordinary in God's will. God may not ask us to do what He asked of Abram, but there are times when He will ask us to give up that which holds us back from achieving His will. This is so difficult for many. If God's will take them out of their comfort zones, they resist and retreat and in doing so, not only loose some of God's greatest blessings, but miss God's best for their lives. The impact they could have made for God and souls is diminished. There are others who are **selective** in what they are willing to renounce what God requires of them. They will never find God's perfect will and blessing with that mindset. God's promise to Abram in Genesis 12:2-3 was amazing. "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all the peoples of the earth will be blessed through you." But first Abram had to turn his back on the life he had built for himself. There was nothing evil about it but it would hinder him from doing God's will and fulfilling God's purposes for him. When we determine that we are going with God there is baggage that will have to be discarded and some legitimate things that will have to be relinquished. Remember that God is good and is concerned about that which is for our good, for He who sees the beginning from the end will ask us to relinquish only those things which will be harmful to us in the long run. The writer to the Hebrews has a word of advice for us in this regard as he urges us to "throw off everything that hinders...." from running the race which God "has marked out for us." Hebrews 12:1. Throw off the baggage of the past. Throw off the hurts, the bitterness and the grudges against people who may have hurt you years ago. Release those things which have demanded your first love. There are things which are sin and then there are the weights which are a hindrance to fulfilling the will of God for your life. Renounce those things and shake yourself free of them and forget them, whether they are sinful or good, and you will reach the objective that God

has for your life. Abrams' start for the promised land began in an act of renunciation. But with Abram there was also an,

b. Act of Obedience. Genesis 12:4. The word tells us that "Abram left as the Lord told him....." Obedience was the test of Abram's commitment. Without question or doubt Abram left as the Lord told him. There will be no progress with God unless first there is an unquestioning obedience to the voice of God. There must be complete obedience **period**, and when God puts in a period, do not change to a question mark. "A selective obedience is not obedience at all." The objectives of our lives with God are reached in unreserved obedience to Him. Abram also reached his objective by,

c. An Act of Faith. Hebrews 11:8. The Word says "By faith Abraham when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went even though he did not know where he was going." Abraham had absolute faith in his God, His integrity, His faithfulness, His power, and His word. This quality of faith was the distinctive mark of his walk with God. He is considered to be the father of those who exercise the same quality of faith. Dr. G. Campbell Morgan said, ".....everyone to day who believes, who lives by faith and obeys when the call comes and is content to make the offering God demands at whatever cost: such are the children of Abraham." F.D. Roosevelt wrote that "the only limit to our realization of tomorrow will be our doubts of today." The only limit to realization of our inheritance will be the doubts of today." The limits do not lie in God; they lie in our lack of faith in Him.

Conclusion

There is a sevenfold recitation of the words "I WILL." Genesis 12:2-3. God says "I will show you a land; I will make you a great nation; I will bless you; I will make your name great; I will bless those who bless you; I will curse those who curse you"; and finally in verse 7 "To your offspring I will give this land." While this chapter tells us about Abram in a greater sense these seven phrases tell us about Abraham's God. It speaks about His power to enable Abraham to pursue his inheritance. God has promised His sanctifying work in our hearts. Paul prayed "May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through.

May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ? The one who calls you is faithful and He will do it." 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24. God has promised us an inheritance. It is the life of victory and holiness. Canaan is a symbol of this. This inheritance is both a possession and a pursuit. There was a moment when the Children of Israel crossed Jordan into the land. It speaks of full surrender to God when in the full assurance of faith we surrender our lives to Christ, and He comes in to sanctify and cleanse our souls. There is a point of surrender it is but the beginning. God's word to His people was that everything part of the land their feet would tread on would be theirs. The message here is that there is much land to be possessed. After God the Holy Spirit cleanses our hearts from all unrighteousness we are urged to go on to perfection. We counseled to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Are YOU following after holiness? May this be our passion this coming year.