

God Builds a Nation (C3PO, My!)
Sermon 2 of 31 of *The Story*
Genesis 12:1-4 & Hebrews 11:8 (Chapter 2)

Words of Welcome/Introduction

Have you ever tried to put a puzzle together beginning with the center pieces?

It's pretty difficult, right?

Most often we begin with the corners and the sides.

We build a framework by which we can put all the pieces together.

Similarly, when putting a puzzle together a box or picture reference helps us in our task.

These first few weeks are us building the framework and seeing how God's Upper Story connects with our Lower Story.

Last week we discovered that God's vision in creation is to be with us.

Adam and Eve chose a different vision and sin and sinful nature entered the human race. Yet, God passionately pursues us at great cost.

So, a corner piece to this *Story* is that the Bible is God's Story of his Great Rescue Plan in bringing us back into that perfect relationship with Him.

Today, we place another corner piece of the puzzle as we C-3 P's of God's Great Rescue Plan, also known as The Upper Story, put into action and discover how God reveals His Power, Presence, and Plan through the most unlikely of people.

Sermon Intro

If you have not already figured it out, I'm pretty much a geek when it comes to sci-fi, especially Star Wars.

So, it should not surprise you that when I began thinking of the second chapter of *The Story* my mind wandered to Star Wars.

Star Wars is based on this unlikely hero Luke Skywalker overcoming great obstacles to save the galaxy.

The Force is brought into balance and his father is redeemed by this ordinary farm boy on this backwater planet on the Outer Rim of the galaxy.

Luke is not a person of rank or prestige like his long-lost sister.

Luke has grown up in a world and culture far different from that of most of the galaxy.

Luke is the last person one would think extraordinary things are to be accomplished through.

He is an unlikely hero.

This brings us now to the second chapter of *The Story*, where we meet two similarly unlikely heroes in Abram and Sarai (later to be renamed Abraham and Sarah).

Abram and Sarai are two people who if alive today would be card carrying members for several decades now of AARP.

In addition to their senior citizen status Abram and Sarai are of modest means and are childless—oh, and did I mention Sarai is barren.

She's not just childless; she's biologically unable to have children at all.

Yet, these are the unlikely people God has chosen to build a chosen nation through.

Now before we discuss the WHO and the WHAT, let's consider the WHERE.

The Place Chooses to Build a New Nation

The Place where the people are: Ur

On your Bible map find the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.

In this area the Tower of Babel was being built by many nations who all had one language.

As we are told in Genesis chapter 11 and God confounded their language and the nations scattered.

God chose to create a new nation in this area of the world.

So, while the land was occupied by the Canaanites at this time, it was part of this Fertile Crescent and possessed abundant resources.

It made sense geographically, but still there is the issue of WHO God chose to build his nation through.

The People God Chose to begin the New Nation

Now, we've already established that God chose Abram and Sarai who were very old, childless, and barren.

Let's add to that the fact that Abram's parents and grandparents worshiped pagan gods AND until God first calls Abram, he too, worshipped these pagan gods...its what families did.

So, why Abram and Sarai?

God chose an old and unlikely couple so that all people would look to God, knowing that all that happens is done by God.

God wants people to see him and understand his plan.

Let's consider our parallel story from Star Wars.

Would the story have been as compelling if Luke had been raised on Alderaan as a member of the royal family like his twin sister Leia?

No! We care about the character because he has to overcome great odds to accomplish what he does.

God is the Master Storyteller and God understands that his Presence, Power, and Plan are revealed to the world first through this unlikely couple.

C3Ps—Power, Presence, & Plan

Do you C?

These 3 P's help form the framework of God's Upper Story.

Power

Presence

Plan

God's Power is shown through his divine favor.

God's Presence is acknowledged through his work.

God's Plan unfolds through a series of acts of faith.

Let's spend a few minutes looking at each of these three "Ps."

Power

God's *power* is exemplified in that he chooses the most unlikely of people to build his nation.

Abram and Sarai are just the first in a long line of unlikely people God demonstrates his Power as his Upper Story, his Great Rescue Plan, unfolds.

Moses was an elderly man with a speech impediment living in exile which God chose to lead the people of Israel out of slavery.

Ruth was a widowed Moabite woman living amongst foreigners through which the line of David would sprout.

David himself was a young boy with no military experience through which God would choose to reign as King of Israel and begin a line of succession to perhaps the most unlikely people of all.

Jesus, son of a carpenter, living in a backwater town on the outer rim of Judea would be the promised Messiah—Savior of Israel and the world.

God's *Power* is often shown through the most unlikely of people.

Presence

Likewise, God's *Presence* is exemplified in the unlikely acts committed by these unlikely people. Two unlikely people, one of which is barren, miraculously give birth to a son at the ripe young age of 90.

This child, named Isaac (which means "He laughs") would later marry and after 20 years of marriage to Rebekah give birth to two twin sons—Jacob and Esau.

From Jacob twelve sons would be born and they would form the Twelve Tribes of Israel.

God could have started his nation from anywhere—Egypt, Babylonia, Samaria, yet he chose to take a nomadic people and raise them up into a nation where his presence to the world might be shown.

Which brings us to the third "P"—Plan.

Plan

God's *Plan* is to pursue us relentlessly, rescue us from ourselves, and return each of us into a right relationship with Him.

So, through God's Power and Presence God's Plan begins to unfold through a series of acts of faith.

One of the first examples of God's Plan unfolding is revealed through these passages in Genesis 12:1-4 and Hebrews 11:8

In Genesis 12:1-4 we read...

The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

² *“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.*

³ *I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you.”*

⁴ *So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran.*

In Hebrews 11:8 we read...

⁸ *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.*

Abram obeyed the command of God by faith.

Faith as a Motivator

Faith, what an interesting word.

I have a sign in my office that I can see straight from my desk, and it reads *“FAITH makes things possible...not easy.”*

One of the first things we can learn from the story of Abram and Sarai about our own Story is that sometimes the way in which God chooses to move is through calling people to make extraordinary acts of faith in obedience to him.

You may not remember but it was this very passage from Genesis that I preached from on my first Sunday with you just over 5 years ago.

I shared that at the age of 35 with a successful career God called me to make a dramatic life change for me and my family and follow Him in faith into a vocation.

Six years later this would lead me to leaving career, family, and familiarity into a new vocation in a new location.

I don't know how God's power and presence will be revealed through me, but I do know that faith was the motivator and is crucial to God's plan unfolding.

What would have happened had Luke remained on that backwater planet of Tatooine?

More importantly...

What would have happened had Abram and Sarai remained in Harran with his Family?

What would have happened had Moses remained in the wilderness and not gone back to Egypt?

What would have happened had Ruth returned to her family in Moab?

What would have happened had David simply kept tending his sheep?

Each of these unlikely people followed God in faith.

But we are not quite finished with Abram and Sarai's story.

Stepping Out In Faith

Abram was asked to step out in faith a second time.

From p. 15 of *The Story* we read...

After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision:

"Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."

But Abram said, "Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."

Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir." He took him outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars — if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

God asks Abram to trust him and know that the nation God would build would come from Abram's flesh and blood.

Abram was asked to step out in faith a third time when God announced that he would have a son by Sarai.

From p. 17 of *The Story* we read...

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers."

Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be

your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.”

God also said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.”

Abram goes from not having children yet a name that means “Father” to Abraham and a name which means “father of many nations.”

Sarai goes from the shame (at least in the culture of her time) of being a barren woman and of modest means with a name that means “princess” to a name which means “queen” which as the mother of nations she became.

Abraham was asked to step out in faith a fourth time when God severely tests Abraham by commanding him to offer Isaac as a sacrifice.

In Genesis 22, or pages 19-20 of *The Story* we learn that Abraham obediently responds believing that God could raise his beloved son to life from the dead (Hebrews 11:7).

Abraham does not understand why he is asked to sacrifice his son.

Abraham does not know where a replacement sacrifice will come from, but he follows God in faith.

From Genesis 22 and *The Story* we learn that Isaac is spared, and a ram is offered in sacrifice.

In a brilliant example of the Master Storyteller—God is foreshadowing and connecting the Upper Story to the Lower Story for the location where Abraham is instructed to go to sacrifice Isaac is Mount Moriah.

2 Chronicles 3:1 tells us that this mountain would be the very site God would have his Temple built.

Two thousand years after Abraham placed Isaac on an alter to be sacrificed and God spared him, in that same location another beloved Son would be sacrificed, and this time is not spared (John 3:16).

For on this very mountain in Jerusalem God would sacrifice his only Son Jesus.

God’s power, presence, and plan demonstrate that God will win us back at great cost to himself.

Application

I have a friend named Jeff who I've known for about seventeen years. My friend Jeff is in his mid 50's and has struggled with his weight since long before I ever knew him.

He's even had some health issues over the years related to his weight.

He's a very average joe.

Several years ago, he began volunteering at his church as they began to reach out to the local jails and prison.

They worked with the prisoners teaching them about financial management, stewardship, etc. as these prisoners neared reentry.

Through this ministry they were also able to show the light of Christ and the hope that comes from helping people with little hope for a future outside begin to see where faith can be a sure and steady foundation.

What began as a monthly visit evolved into a weekly ministry.

Soon Jeff took another step in faith and discerned that God was calling him to devote more of his life to helping prisoners reenter society.

So, he began a non-profit went back to school to learn best practices in prison ministry.

Three years ago, he quit his job and was ordained a priest in his denomination and began to work full-time in prison ministry.

If you met Jeff, you'd think him the most unlikely of people for God to launch a prison ministry.

His youth is behind him.

He is of modest means.

He has suffered from weight and health related issues.

Yet, God chose him to begin this ministry.

Jeff simply had to say "yes" for God's power, presence, and plan to begin to unfold in his life and the lives of those he encounters in his ministry.

Closing

Friends, through the unlikely heroes of faith—Abraham and Sarah we begin to see the framework of God’s Upper Story—His Great Rescue Plan take shape.

God’s power, presence, and plan are demonstrated as God chooses this unlikely couple by which to build a nation from which the Messiah—our Savior Jesus Christ would be born.

God’s power, presence, and plan are demonstrated as God chooses this unlikely person to enter ministry.

God’s power, presence, and plan are demonstrated as God chooses this unlikely person Jeff to launch a prison ministry.

There are many pieces of this puzzle to place, but today you’ve heard how God can take unlikely people who when they place their faith in God, extraordinary things happen.

Where or how is God calling you to example his power and presence in the lives of others?

How will others begin to “C” God’s power, presence, and plan through your obedient faith?

Amen.