



**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent – March 4-6, 2023**

**Preacher: Pastor Scott Oelhafen**

**Sermon Theme: *God's Picture of a "Full Life"***

**1. *How it's empty without God* 2. *How it's filled with God***

**Sermon Text: Genesis 12:1:1-8**

The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. <sup>2</sup> "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. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." 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. <sup>5</sup> He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. <sup>6</sup> Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. <sup>7</sup> The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him. <sup>8</sup> From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and 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.

Dear brothers and sisters in God's chosen family,

Who do you know that has "it made?" In other words, who do you know that has the "world by the tail?" Maybe you've rubbed shoulders with the latest lead in the play or the homecoming king or queen or you work right next to the reigning "employee of the year." Or it's possible, you live down the street from that super-mom or super-dad who can do it all and you think to yourself: "why can't that be me?." Do you know of anyone that has the drop-dead looks of a Scarlett Johansen or a Ryan Reynolds, the "life of the party" personality of a Jimmy Fallon or the bulging bank account of an Amazon's Jeff Bezos? The celebrities I just mentioned seem like they have it all together. From the outside looking in, they may seem like they have a "full life," -- the whole package of health, wealth, and personality. But, how do any of these things help us when we die? Don't we need something more? King Solomon, the wisest man ever to live, said that living only for this life is "***meaningless, a chasing after the wind***" (Ecclesiastes 3: 17b). Clearly, caring for our eternal souls which last forever needs to be our primary concern. That's why we've gathered in this sanctuary to hear God's Word: so the Holy Spirit can fill us up with God's picture of a "full life." Let's not make the classic mistake of begrudging others God's blessings and miss seeing God's gifts in our own lives. Instead, as we spend time in God's Holy Word, let's take a few minutes to talk about what God considers a "full" life. And at the end of this sermon, I pray that no matter if you could model as a poster king/queen or a poster child, if your life savings

has more than 8 zeros or just 1 zero, you are personally included in **God's Picture of a "Full Life."**

The Hollywood stars I just mentioned like Scarlett, Jimmy, or Jeff, seem almost mythical, don't they? They don't seem real. Oh sure, streaming video brings them into the palms of our hands and right into our living rooms. But, their rich and famous lifestyles make them seem like they live in a galaxy far, far away. And for most of us living up to their standards is mathematically impossible. That's why God brings a man named Abram up close, and personal for us. Abram wasn't mythical. He was a living, breathing, believer of God who lived almost 4000 years ago near modern day Iraq. You may know Abram better as Abraham. God called him as the founder of the Jewish nation and the direct ancestor of Jesus Christ.

Abram was the kind of man who experienced real problems and real joys. I guarantee that there were times in Abram's life when he felt like God was holding out on him. There were times when Abram felt like: God, where are you? Have you ever felt that way before? If so, then, let's take a longer look at **God's Picture of a "Full Life"**. Like Abram, we'll discover how our lives are empty without God. Then, we'll learn how they are only filled with God.

Let's go back to the beginning, the book of beginnings called Genesis, as we read again the first verse of chapter 12: **The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.** What God was really saying here is this: "Abram, I want you to pack up everything you own and move your family, right now. I'm not going to tell you exactly where you are going or exactly how you're going to get there. You're just going to have to trust me. Can you do that, Abram: trust me?" I wonder how many of us could do that: leave the security of our friends and family to go to a distant country. It took faith to follow God like this. And that's what happened! It's been said: "Faith doesn't always know where it's going, but it knows who's doing the leading." When we took my kids on a family vacation to see their cousins in California, we trucked around in the rental car all over the area. Finally, when I parked, I asked my kids: do you have any idea where we are at? They said they didn't have a clue. I asked them if they were scared and they just shook their heads. I asked them why they weren't scared. They said: you know where we are going and you'll get us back home." That's what faith looks like. And Abram had that kind of faith in God, who is much better than any earthly father on vacation. Abram knew that God had called him to go, so he went. He didn't need to know all the details.

But, why did God call Abram anyway? Out of millions of people on the planet, what was so special about him? Did Abram deserve it? Of course not. Abram was a sinner like us. Still, Abram is listed in the great Hall of Faith chapter of Hebrews, chapter 11. He's listed as a "great man of faith." ***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.*** But, Abram didn't start out this way. His family didn't even start out believing in God. He had spiritual skeletons in his closet. His life

was empty when he didn't follow God. The Bible doesn't hide the fact how Abram lied and tried to pass off his wife as his sister to save his life several times. It doesn't try to cover up how Abram fathered a child with his servant-girl Hagar. There were times when Abram seemed to have a full life without God: money, family, and a comfortable life. But, without God, it was really empty, spiritually empty.

Has our world figured that one out yet? Have we figured it out? Our lives are equally empty without Christ. The devil tries to con our world into believing every one BUT God for spiritual direction. The devil cons us to believe our own imperfect reason, at the expense of God's perfect Word. He cons us to believe our changeable emotions which go up or down, at the expense of His unchangeable promises. My friends, each of us has spiritual skeletons in our closets, don't we? How many times haven't we thought something, said something, or even did something that we've immediately regretted? The words from Ezekiel strike us right between the eyes: ***the soul who sins is the one who will die (Ezekiel 18:4)***. We all know where this is headed (the grave, for every one of us) and that should wake us up. We are no better than our ancestors.

But, just like God found and filled Abram who was spiritually empty, God finds and fills us. It's all part of ***God's Picture of a "Full Life."*** God didn't fill Abram's heart with unrealistic commands and demands. Instead, God filled him with promises, actually seven promises. Listen again: *(God said) : 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.* Did you count how many promises I just read? There were six. Take those six promises separately, and they sound pretty good all on their own. Summing them up: God promised Abram that he'd have a big family, people would know him (as a famous person), and those who spoke well of Abram would be blessed too.

But, don't forget the most important promise: the seventh one! The seventh promise is key because it explains the other six. God promised Abram: ***... all the peoples of the earth will be blessed through you.*** That promise explains why Abram had a full life: the Savior of the world would be born from his family tree. That promise filled Abram and His family with God's eternal presence, His constant protection, and a peace that was literally out of this world. That promise led Abram to gratefully respond by ***building an altar to the LORD and calling on the name of the LORD.*** That promise, led Abram to rededicate His life in service to the one who loved Him fully and unconditionally.

God is still keeps that last promise to us today. We are blessed because God kept His promise to send a descendant of Abram into the world to save us: not from our taxes or not just from our temporary troubles, but from sin, death, and hell. Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of all those promises. The Lenten season focuses us on Jesus, God's suffering servant. We focus on the fact that Jesus earned heaven for every person on this planet with His painful death on the cross and glorious resurrection from the grave. By God's grace, we believe that Jesus is our Savior from sin, and we've got

it made. We've got it made in life because Jesus supplies us with His all-powerful strength to face any and every situation. We've got it made in death because Jesus promises to fully share with us His victory in heaven, our forever home. That's how God gives us a **Picture of a "Full Life."**

Doesn't that lead us to do something? Doesn't that lead us to gratefully respond to the one who loved us and gave Himself for us? For me, the poem of the weaver, puts the faith of Abram and **God's Picture of a "Full Life"** into perspective. The poem goes like this: *My life is but a weaving between my Lord and me; I cannot choose the colors He works so steadily. Often times He weaves sorrow and I, in foolish pride, Forgets He sees the upper, And I the underside. Not til the loom is silent And the shuttle ceases to fly, Shall God unroll the canvas And explain the reason why.* Until we arrive in heaven, my friends, like Abram, we'll walk by faith and not by sight. Of course, we won't be able to see God's entire plan this side of heaven. But, Jesus has told us that **He has come that we may have life, and have it to the full** (*John 10:10*). With Him leading us, we know that we have it made, for time and for eternity. And that's a perfect picture. Amen.