

An Old Example

by Dennis Kinlaw

God wants a personal relationship with us, and that requires detachment from things that control us and putting God ahead of people and possessions.

Duration: 42:27

Scripture: Genesis 12:1-3, Genesis 22:1-2, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 27:35, John 1:3, John 3:16, Hebrews 13:5

Topics: "Example"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by emphasizing the importance of knowing and trusting Jesus. He shares a story of a missionary who had to overcome her fear and attachment to comfort in order to spread the message of Christ in Africa. The speaker then discusses the need to be detached from possessions and friends in order to be effective in God's redemptive work. He references the story of Abraham and how he was called by God to be a priest for the world, emphasizing the need for detachment in order to fulfill this calling.

Transcript

Here the word of God is found in the book of Genesis, reading from chapter 12. 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. 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 peoples on earth will be blessed through you. So Abram left, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him.

Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. He took his wife Sarah, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated, and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. Abram traveled through the land as far as the sight of the great tree of Moorah at Shechem.

The Canaanites were then in the land, but 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. From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel, and pitched his tent with Bethel on the west, and I on the east.

There he built an altar to the Lord, and called on the name of the Lord. Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev. Would you pray with me? Our Lord, you promised that if we would come together to talk about you, that before we finished you would be present, and you've kept your promise to us these days, and we thank you now for keeping it this morning.

Finish saying what you wanted to say to us this week. Give us ears to hear, and hearts to understand and obey the word which you give, and we will give you thanks in Jesus' name, amen. We began on Monday saying that what Jesus wanted when he came was for people to find out who he was, so that knowing who he was, they would come to trust him, and coming to trust him, they would find that he was worthy of their love.

Now that's the thing that God is always looking for in men. Sometimes we tend to think that what he wants is obedience, or some extraordinary sacrifices or some great and noble deeds, but basically what he wants is for us to come to the kind of personal relationship with him to where that relationship will be determinative for everything else within our lives. Now what does it mean when a man comes to the place where, or when a woman comes to the place where, he or she has that kind of vital and living personal knowledge of and relatedness to the Lord Jesus? One of the most fascinating things to me in Scripture is its unity.

That's one of the reasons that I believe that it is inspired, and that God, when he gave to us the Old Testament, was preparing the way for the New, and that the New is illustrative of and definitive of, basically, the revelation that was given in the Old. And so I don't think it's an accident that perhaps the greatest illustration that we have of what it means for a man to be related to God and let that personal relationship bring his total existence under its control is found not in the New Testament, but is found in the Old, and it is found in the first of the characters that is definitively described in the Old Testament. You know as well as I that I am speaking about Abraham, the first great man of faith found in the word of God.

Have you ever noticed the nature of what Abraham's religion was? You read in the New Testament that he was a man that pleased God. Paul, when he looked in Romans, for someone, is a supreme example of justification by faith of a man who trusted God, reached back across the Isaiahs and the Amoses and the Davids and the Moses, and went all the way back to this first great figure in the Old Testament. And he chose Abraham as the example of faith.

Now notice the nature of Abraham's faith and of Abraham's religion. It was simply a personal attachment to the Lord God of Israel. Israel of course hadn't come into existence yet, but to the Lord God it was a personal attachment to him that caused that attachment to determine everything else in his life.

You will notice that his life was not characterized by law. He did not have the Ten Commandments as we know them given at Sinai. So it was not his keeping a set of external standards that made him acceptable to God.

You will remember that there was no great religious structure in his day. You will find as you move on past the book of Genesis, get into Exodus, that there God begins to spell out a religious structure in a religious system. And from then on, the people of God were responsible to let their lives reflect conformity to that religious system.

But the religious system is not a part of Abraham's life. That is not because God is opposed to law or thinks it inconsequential. You will find that the Gospels make that very clear.

One never meets God but that he meets him in the presence of moral demands. But nevertheless, here is Abraham prior to the giving of the Ten Commandments and prior to the giving of what we speak of as Old Testament law or Mosaic law. Not because they're wrong, but because they are really accidents, if you'll let me use philosophical language here, they are really accidents of faith or expressions of faith rather than the essence of that faith.

And so it is right that God in his infinite wisdom should give to us before he shows us a faith illustrated in many exhibitions, that he should give us an illustration of faith in its essence. And that's the beauty of the life of Abraham. What was that essence? It was a personal friendship to the extent that later Abraham can be called a friend of God, the man who believed God.

Never preached a sermon to our knowledge, never led a missionary tour to our knowledge, never built a church. What did he do? He put his hand in the Lord God's hand and let the Lord God lead him for the duration of his life, and he dared to believe what his friend the Lord God said to him and believed it enough that he staked his life on it and let it be determinative for him. Now that shouldn't be surprising to us if we started Genesis and had our eyes open while we read, because you will remember that the climax of the creation story was not a church service or an evangelistic campaign or a missionary tour.

It was the cool of the day, when the Lord God came down and walked with his creatures and had fellowship with them. You will remember that there was one exception between that and Abraham whom death did not claim. This righteous man, what was it that characterized him? All that we're told is that he walked with God.

And you know you cannot walk with a person without coming to know him. And so now God says to Abraham and Ur of the Chaldees, will you put your hand in mine and will you spend the rest of your life accompanying me? And that's what he did as far as religion is concerned. You see, what God wanted was, was Abraham to attach himself to him.

Not to a law, nor to a religion, but to him, the living God. Now it's interesting when one attaches oneself to anything. There is always a negative as well as a positive, and there were negatives in Abraham's attachment, because if you attach yourself in one direction, that means you detach yourself in some others.

I remember when I looked at Elsie and said, will you marry me? Didn't think about it too much then, but that ruled out a billion and a half other women. There's just something about it, that when you move in one direction, it cuts off a whole of a lot of others. And so there's a negative side to attachment.

And so God looks at him and he spells out the attachment in negative terms. Notice what he says, I want you to leave your country, I want you to leave your people, and I want you to leave your household or your family. So as you attach to me, that means that you have to put country, people, family, household behind you.

Now why did God do this to him? You know, I think I understand some of why. One of the things I want to ask God one of these days is all that he meant by this. But I think one of the reasons he did this is because it is in our country, the place where we live, the people of whom we are a part, and the family to which we belong that we get our identity, our security, and our personal fulfillment or our personal delights, our personal joys.

If we were to run a test through this crowd this morning as to family names, you know what we would find? We would find that most of our family names come under three kinds. They either are place names, they're names given to us by our family, our fathers, or they come from professions. And it's interesting, that's how we identify each other.

Kinlaw's a place name. I know that the first Kinlaw that came to this country couldn't read or write, because K-I-N-L-A-W is not the way the places spell. It's spelled K-I-N-L-O-C-H.

And so somebody asked the first Kinlaw who got on this side of the water, What's your name? And he said, Kinlaw. And the fellow listening didn't hear the C-H and wrote down K-I-N-L-A-W. And there have been a few Kinlaws in the United States ever since.

Not many, but a few. A place name. We get our identity in traveling.

You sit down on a plane and look at the guy next to you and you say, where are you from? You begin to get some identity. Or you say, what's your business? It's interesting how many people in this crowd, their names come from jobs. Carpenters, fishers, farmers.

There may even be some bishops in here. But we get our names oftentimes from jobs. Because there's where we get identity.

Or we get them from our family. John's son, or William's son, or O'Donnell. And if you're an Armenian, the I-N on the end of your name means family of.

Like our Procegan is son of Parsee. This is the way we get our identity. And the Lord God looks at Abraham and says, I want you to get your identity out of your relationship to me.

Now we get our security in these things. And the Lord God says to Abraham, I want you to get your security, not in things and places and positions, but in your relationship to me. You know, Jesus picked that up.

And if you said, if you'll seek me first in my kingdom, these other things that you usually find your security and your fulfillment in, they'll take care of themselves, but put me in my kingdom first. God gave us an example in Abraham, our personal fulfillment, our joy. He says, I want you, Abraham, to find your fulfillment and your greatest joy in me.

So he was detaching him, detaching him from good things, nothing wrong with any of those, but shaking that attachment there so he could attach him to himself because he wanted to be the essence of his life. You know, that happens in human relations. It's very beautiful.

There was a good day when I finally got up the courage to look at Elsie and say, I love you. And it was a better day when she looked back at me and sort of hesitantly said, I love you. But you know a better day than either of those? When finally I looked at her and grinned and said, you're hooked.

I know you love me. That is security. And God wanted to bring Abraham to the place where God could look at Abraham and say, Abraham, I know you're hooked.

I've got you. You belong to me. And you know, the funny thing is, ever since that day, everything I've got I've wanted to give to Elsie.

And everything God has, he waits to give to those that get hooked on him. Now, why is it that he wants this personal relationship? There's no question but that he finds value simply in the relationship, in the joy of fellowship with his own. He loves us, and he likes us, and wants to commune with us, but he also has a purpose.

Because with that salvation and with that fellowship comes mission, and there's no way you can miss it in Scripture. You know, I used to think that the Great Commission was a New Testament thought and came at the end of Jesus' ministry, but that was simply my own ignorance. Because if you'll go back and read the story of Genesis, you will find that from the first page of Scripture to the end, God never had anything else in mind but the whole world.

And when Adam and Eve sinned, the question was how he could rebuild relations with them. And when the world became evil and evil only, and judgment came, and God started again, he had the whole world in mind, not a tribe or a nation or a family. Why? When he moved through Noah, it was to build a world with whom he could have fellowship.

And then when that world, as it developed, turned its back upon him, he said, how can I reach the whole world before it destroys itself in its own lostness and in its own sin? And so he said, I'll find somebody who'll work for me. And he looked for a man, he looked for a person, and he found Abraham. And he said, I want you to walk with me, but I've got bigger things in mind than you, because in you I want all the nations of the earth to be blessed.

You see, he's a father. He has no favorites, and he cares as much about the atheists today as he does the most saintly man that lives. Fathers like love, not only their sons with whom they have good relations, but their hearts reach out to those that have shut them out, too.

And so he says to Abraham, I want you to be a mediator between me and a world that has lost me. You will notice that that's picked up again and again in Scripture. It's there in Genesis 12, you find it at Sinai, when he brings Israel out of Egypt, out of Egyptian bondage, and there at the mountain he says, I want to make you a kingdom of priests.

Now when a priest ministers, for whom does he minister? He ministers for himself, but primarily he is a middle man between the God being worshipped and the people whom he represents. And so God says to Israel, what the family of Aaron and the tribe of Levi are to you as the priests, you are to be to the world, because my interest is the last person that lives, and my heart reaches out for those. And so he calls him in order that his world might be redeemed.

Now what kind of person is it that can join God in the redemption of the world? He has to be detached. If the world's going to be reached, he has to be detached from place, and he has to be detached from possessions, and he has to be detached from friends and loved ones if he's going to be a part of God's redemptive work. You will notice that that's what happened with Abraham.

He said, I can't reach the world if you stay here in Ur of the Chaldees. I want you to leave. I want you to go with me, and I will take you to a land that you do not know.

When I get back home this next week, we're going to be putting our youngest daughter on a plane and shipping her overseas. She's special. She's a twin, an identical twin.

She was born on Christmas Day, and she's redheaded. Anybody that's redheaded is special, especially when you've got three of them in your family. She doesn't want to leave her identical twin, but she has a call from God.

I know a little of the trauma that she goes through, and I must admit it sort of warms my heart that there's trauma for her in leaving. I had a dear friend when I was in college, two of them. They spent most of their lives in Africa as a missionary.

When she got ready to get on the boat in New York City 35 years ago to go to Africa, she froze, and her husband had to physically pick her up and carry her up the gangplank. But there are stacks of people in Africa today who would not know about Christ if she had not permitted him to carry her up that gangplank. Now if we're going to be attached to place, a world is not going to be reached.

We have to be detached also from possessions, because you see, unless we're loosed from things, they will control us instead of the Lord God. It's interesting in Abraham's story. He came to that point.

You'll remember that Lot's servants and his servants were having trouble. And Abraham said, What is it? And they said, They're fighting over grazing territories and water territories. And Abraham looked at Lot and said, We can't let that kind of thing come between worshipers of the Lord God.

You pick out which section of the country you want, and I'll take what's left. And so old Lot, he looked down and saw the green grassy areas and could see fat sheep and cattle. Well, he said, If I can have what I want, I'll take that.

Abraham said, Fine. And he took the sparse hills that were left. But his first commitment was not to his own security and possessions.

It was to the will of God. And you know, I'll tell you something. To the extent you're hooked to things, you will be to that extent useless to the living God.

I remember a story from Fritz Kreisler, who when I was a kid was the world's most famous violinist, a man who sort of caught the imagination, unusual, but a musician who caught the imagination of a substantial chunk of the world. I don't know whether the story is authentic or not. I just simply remember reading it, but I never forgot it.

A newspaper reporter was interviewing Fritz Kreisler, and he said, Mr. Kreisler, you live in New York. Do you own a home in New York? He said, No. Do you own a home anywhere? Mr. Kreisler said, No.

You live in an apartment? Yes. Do you own the apartment in which you live? No. Do you own an apartment anywhere? No.

Do you ever expect to own a home? No. Why not, Mr. Kreisler? This I think reflected something of his background. He said, If I owned a home, it would stand between me and all the homeless of the world.

Now, you know, so oftentimes the things we possess unfortunately possess us. And he says, I want to possess you so I can move you as I see fit. You know the story of he came to him and said, Will you sacrifice Isaac? And he had to detach from the person he loved more than he loved his own life.

One of the greatest missionaries in this century, when he was a college student, wrote his mother, who was a widow, and said, God has called me to the mission field. And she wrote him back and said, You've

certainly misunderstood. I'm a widow.

I am ill. I have a sickness that is permanent. It is your responsibility as a Christian son to take care of me.

And it shook him. And he knelt over his mother's letter and prayed over it, and God would not relieve him from his call. So he sat down and wrote back and said, Mother, I'm sorry.

It isn't that I don't love you, but God will not let me go. He's called me to the mission field. And his mother wrote back and said, You have misunderstood.

God would not ask you to leave me like this. He wept and finally wrote her back and said, It's not that I love you less, but that it is Christ must be Lord, and I must trust you to him. When she got that letter, she read it and the Spirit of God spoke to her, and she realized her own sinfulness, and she wept out her heart to God and asked him to forgive her.

You know the interesting thing? I hesitate to tell you this, because all stories don't turn out this way. But the interesting thing is, she got well. Well, she would have died a cripple if she had not turned her son loose.

She would have died a cripple if he had let her claim on him stand over Christ's claim on him. There is nobody in your life that is safe if you put him or her ahead of Christ. When you put any person in your life ahead of Christ, you then become corruption to that person.

So God says, You have to put me ahead of the people you love. Now that's rough, isn't it? We find our security. We find our identity.

We find our pleasures in places and in possessions and in people. But you know the interesting thing is, that if I read the scripture correct, God says, You know Abe, I'm not asking you to do anything I'm not willing to do. You remember the story about one who, we used to sing when I was in Sunday school, Out of the ivory palaces into a world of woe, only his great eternal love made my Savior go.

And let me tell you something, Ur-the-Chaldees was a center of culture and of learning and a delightful place from the world's point of view, and the place where God took Abraham was backward and primitive and away from where things really were. But the gap between Ur and Palestine or Canaan was not nearly as wide as the gap that was crossed by the eternal Son of God when he left the right hand of the eternal throne to go to Nazareth with its dirt and its filth and its narrowness and obscurantisms. God says, Abe, I won't ask you to do what I'm not willing to do.

What about possessions? John said he made all things, all things were made by him and without him was not anything made that was made. And then there comes a Friday and they strip his last possession off his back and hang him nude on a cross, and the Creator there. What about people? I had a friend about six years ago that gave me a new translation of the New Testament into Israeli Hebrew, and so I started reading, very interesting to read the Gospels in Hebrew.

An interesting thing took place. I was reading one day the third chapter of John, and at the same time I was reading the twenty-second chapter of Genesis. You remember the twenty-second chapter of Genesis is the sacrifice of Isaac.

In that story God says, I want you to take your son, your only son, and sacrifice him. Detach. Three times in that chapter God says, I want you to take your son, your only son, and sacrifice him.

The Hebrew word for son is ben. The Hebrew word for only, the text is yachid, the single, only one, he didn't have any more. Last.

So God said, I want you, Abraham, to take your ben, your ben yachid, and sacrifice him. I suddenly noticed in John 3.16 in Israeli Hebrew, God says, For God so loved the world that he gave his ben, his ben yachid, that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have everlasting life. I thought I heard a conversation that took place out on Mount Moriah while Abraham was tying Isaac up and laying him on the altar and raising his knife to kill him and then having his hand seized and his attention grasped and a voice spoke, Abraham, Abraham, don't touch him.

And I thought I heard the second person of the Blessed Trinity say to the first person of the Blessed Trinity, you and I are coming back one of these days to this hilltop, aren't we? And the father said, yes, it'll be about 1,900 years, and the eternal son said, and father, when we come back the next time, it's not going to be one of our creatures down here that's going to be up for sacrifice, is it? And the eternal father said, no, son, you're going to be the one. And the eternal son looked back at the father and said, father, when they stretch me out on that cross and lay my hands on those beams and take those spikes and start to put them in my hands and that spike through my ankles, are you going to stop them? And the eternal father looked back at the son and said, no, son, I'm not going to stop them. We never ask our children to do anything even in symbol that we are not ready to do in reality.

And so the day came, and Jesus lifted his face and looked for his father, and he wasn't there. And he cried out, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani. It's interesting.

God will never ask you to do anything that he has not already done. Yes, it's a price. But you know what you get in exchange? You get a fellowship that makes every other gift of God inconsequential.

You see, there is one thing better than the best of all of God's gifts, and that is God himself, and he's worth the price. Do you know that, Dr. Al, Jesus, priceless treasure? Interesting description of Jesus, isn't it? Jesus, priceless treasure, source of purest pleasure, truest friend to me. Long my heart had panted, till it well nigh fainted, thirsting after thee.

Thine I am, O spotless Lamb, I will suffer not to hide thee. Ask for naught beside thee. C.S. Lewis had said, you know, the man who has everything, plus God, is not a whit richer than the man who has nothing but God.

And the man who only has God, what an only, the man who only has God is not a whit poorer than the man who has God plus everything. You see, that's sort of pietistic religion, isn't it? Sort of mystical, to get to the place where Jesus is enough and you don't have to have anything else. Well, I was interested in who wrote, Jesus, priceless treasure, source of purest pleasure, truest friend to me.

Long my heart had panted, till it well nigh fainted, thirsting after thee. Thine I am, O spotless Lamb, I will suffer not to hide thee. There's the detachment.

Ask for naught beside thee. You know, he wasn't a monk. He wasn't even a preacher.

He was the mayor of a major city in Germany, and a member of the House of Parliament, and a political leader. Do you know what we need in our society today? We need people who've come to the place where they know that God is better even than his gifts, and they're willing to pay any price to have him in his fullness within their lives. And you know, then God takes people like that, and he uses them the way he used his Son.

And a world finds redemption through them. He's looking for people. Are you his? Has he got you to where you're hooked? Shall we bow our heads together? Heads bowed, eyes closed.

I'd like for you to forget about the person on the right, the person on the left, before, in front or behind. I'd like for you to be conscious of him. And as you're conscious of him, will you let him speak? I wonder if anywhere in this group there's anybody who says, Yes, he's spoken to me.

I've had too many reservations in my life. I've had my hand on it. I'd like for my life to be wholly his, so he can be wholly mine.

And I want to tell him that today. And I want to say, Lord, it may not be anybody else, but I want to be yours. Keep your heads bowed, your eyes closed.

If you mean that, if it's anybody like that, would you stand? Keep your heads bowed, your eyes closed. You may be seated. Dear Lord, thank you for coming.

And thank you for speaking. And thank you for laying your heart, your hand, upon some hearts and lives. Thank you for these that have responded.

And we pray that as they go from this place, there will be that sense of commitment and of belonging. You said, Whatsoever touches the altar is holy. They've reached out today.

And they've told you that they're theirs. You finish your work within their hearts. And let them know an intimacy with you that they've never known before.

You disclose yourself in ways you've never disclosed before. And make these to be special instruments of your grace. A royal priesthood to a world that's lost.

And we will give you thanks. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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