



## Sermon Notes

**Term** – Autumn 2018

**Series** – Launching the Year

**Gathering & Date** – 10 & 5, 9 September

**Title** – Happy in Harran ...

**Preacher** – Paul

**Reading** – Genesis 11:27 – 12:9

**Main message of this talk in one sentence** – You cannot follow *and* settle: those 2 actions are incompatible – you must choose one or the other ...

### **Main points** –

#### **1. Introduction**

The account of Abram (later Abraham) is the pivotal point at which scripture moves from pre-history (Genesis 1 – 11) to history.

This does not infer that what we read in Genesis 1 – 11 is not historical or accurate, simply that it is less easy to 'locate' its events in other recorded human history:

- nearly every ancient culture tells the story of the flood
- the tower of Babel may well have been a ziggurat such as the celebrated one in Ur

But it's with Abram that we can really begin to date and locate bible characters and events – we know where Ur was, we know that it was the biggest city on earth 5000 years ago with over 65,000 citizens; the Romans record the location of Harran, and there is plentiful evidence of the migration of Amorite peoples from Canaan to Harran and on to Ur. The names of Terah and his family suggest they may have been among them. For the geographers among us, the journey from Ur to Harran is estimated at around 700 miles, with another 800 miles from Harran to Canaan ... see map below

#### **2. God's Call**

While God's purpose is always global ...

- ... all peoples on earth will be blessed through you (Genesis 12:3)
- ... make disciples of all nations ... (Matthew 28:19)
- ... which is why we answer our own 'Why are we here?' question with: the church exists to change the world ...

... His call is always individual ... which is why the bible is full of God's dealings with individuals – with kings, rulers and whole nations mostly playing bit parts in relation to those individuals (e.g. Pharaoh to Abraham or Moses – the opposite of the modern understanding of how geo-political reality works)

The word 'global' doesn't necessarily mean the other side of the world – it simply means that God's call on your life is never just for your own blessing. God doesn't just want you to thrive – he wants the context in which he has set you to be transformed: be it a home, a street, a workplace, a family, a place of learning or leisure.

God's call is to be the person he made you in the place he calls you.

God's call is always to

- place
- people

We want here those God has called and is calling to this place – Christ Church – and this people – our church family. That means being present, seeing Christ Church as 'my community' not just the church I attend.

This is one of a number of culture shifts God is working through his church across the world

- from seeing the church as a place of refuge to seeing the church as a people of rescue
- from the church as a place which only sucks in people & energy to resource its own programmes to one which increasingly releases people & energy to transform culture

But God's call is always also 'from' somewhere ...

I've long been fascinated by the account of Terah (who, we are told in Genesis 11, was an 9<sup>th</sup> generation descendant of Noah). Although we are given no explicit reason in the text as to why he set out for Canaan (going against the tide of people migration at the time); but given what follows in the call of his son Abram, it is at least plausible that he heard the Lord's call to Canaan but didn't quite make it ...

*<sup>31</sup> Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Harran, they **settled** there. <sup>32</sup> Terah lived 205 years, and **he died in Harran**. Genesis 11:31-32*

Hence the title of this talk, 'Happy in Harran ...'

Wherever here is for you right now, it may well be a great place – but you're not called to settle, you're called to move ...

Jesus' call is to 'follow'

- Matthew (4:19) and Mark (1:17) record Jesus' first words to those who became his followers, aptly enough: 'Come, follow me.'
- Luke (5:1-11, 27) & John (1:39, 43) depict Jesus acting in such a way that people 'left everything and followed him' – Luke 5:11
- Later in Luke (5:27) and John (1:43) Jesus says to Levi / Matthew and Philip, 'Follow me'
- In Luke 5 Jesus calls people to be gospel fishermen – the purpose of God is always global (beyond myself) and his call always individual (Follow me)

You cannot 'follow' and 'settle' at the same time – the two actions (following and settling are both actions based on decision) are incompatible. You can 'follow' by 'staying' if that is God's call, but the call to stay is never an invitation to settle.

The rest of the New Testament pursues this theme of movement

- externally:

*'... you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'*  
Acts 1:8

- internally: the inner journey of conversion & the lifelong journey of sanctification (being made more like Jesus by the indwelling presence and power of his Holy Spirit)

Hebrews 11 is a song of rejoicing over all those who

*<sup>13</sup> ... were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. <sup>14</sup> People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. <sup>15</sup> If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. <sup>16</sup> Instead, they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. Hebrews 11:13-16*

If you settle in Haran, you may, like Terah, die there, never seeing the place or realising the destiny for which you were born ...

### **For further thought and prayer –**

In what sense are you engaged with God's 'global' purposes for your life?

Are you called to place and people?

How is the call of Jesus to 'Come, follow me' playing out in your life?

In what ways has the Vision booklet published in April of this year begun to reshape your thinking about the Lord's call on your life?

What do 'Harran' & 'Canaan' mean to you? Have you settled in Harran? Or are you still en-route for Canaan?

Key verse: So Abram went, as the Lord had told him ... Genesis 12:4

The journey from Ur to Canaan via Haran

