

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.

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 left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran.** ⁵ **He took his wife Sarai, 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.**

⁶ **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.** ⁷ **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.**

⁸ **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.** (NIV84)

Theme: The High Cost of Following Christ:

1. Willingly give up everything.
2. Willingly Carry your Cross.

Just this past week I read an article online about Aaron and Melissa Klein. They used to own a bakery in Oregon. But last fall a lesbian couple asked them to bake a cake for their wedding. As Christians, Aaron and Melissa declined because they could not in good conscience participate or be involved in such a wicked and sinful event. As Aaron put it, “I believe marriage is between a man and a woman, I don’t want to help somebody celebrate a commitment to a lifetime of sin.” Melissa added, “The Bible tells us to flee from sin, I don’t think making a cake for it helps.”

What did Aaron and Melissa get for doing what is right in the eyes of God? Well a discrimination report was filed against them, and an investigation by Oregon’s Bureau of Labor and Industries was started. Soon some homosexuals threatened to boycott any business who would work with the Klein’s bakery. Without any customers Aaron and Melissa were unable to keep their business and they had to close their doors. Because they obeyed Christ they lost their business and their livelihood. They may even face jail time or some other type of prosecution.

It’s a sad story, but it reminds us of the high cost of following Christ. Like the Kleins we must be willing both to give up everything and to carry our cross willingly.

Abraham, back when he was known as Abram, lived in Ur—in what we call Mesopotamia. It was quite an affluent area. At the time they city lay on the banks of the Gulf of Persia. So they had a bustling economy. It was a hotbed of culture. Archeological excavations have found large, elaborate buildings. I’m sure it was a great place to live. But then, one day the Lord spoke to Abram. **Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.**

Do you realize what God wanted Abram to do? This is where Abram grew up. It was his Father’s house. It was his homeland. All of his relatives still lived there. God asked Abram to leave behind everything he knew. To leave his country, his relatives, and his home. He had to uproot his family. And not just once but twice.

And so Abram did. As we read in verse 4, **So Abram left, as the LORD had told him.** Abram and his family went to Haran, north of Ur and northeast of Canaan. There they stayed for over 40 years, until Abram’s Father died. Then God once again told Abram to leave. And he led him to the land of Canaan. Abram was able to take his possessions and his servants along with him. But for the most part, Abram gave up everything for Christ.

Are you willing to follow Abram’s example? Are you willing to give up everything for the sake of Christ? Sadly, we often fail to do just that. We have a hard enough time giving up some sleep or a little free time for God, let alone our house. We have a hard time giving up

work, or money let alone our country. We rarely give up time with our friends, let alone our other relatives. It's not like God is asking you to give up much right now. He's not asking you to move way, leaving your home, family, and country. No, he is asking you to make him a priority—over friends or family, over work, having fun, getting way, sleeping, relaxing, your kids sports practices and games, other activities you and your family are in. He's not asking for much, but even those little things are often too much for us to give up.

Oh sure, we might give up some things for Christ—a few hours on Sunday morning whenever it fits into our schedule; a few extra dollars we had left over from the week; or perhaps even some of your talents volunteering at Church. What would you do if God would ask you to give up something that you cared about deeply? Like your house, your friends, your family, or your business? Would you leave everything behind like Abram, would you forfeit your business like the Kleins, or reject your family members like Jesus tells us to in our gospel for today? Sadly the answer may not always be, 'yes.' See, we don't want to give up too much and suffer because of it. We want to have an easy and fun life. We love our comfortable lives so much that we often don't have the desire to give up everything for Christ.

When God told Abram to leave everything, God also promised to bless him. In verses 2-3 God gave Moses a seven-fold blessing, **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.** Later on God made Abram another promise. **To your offspring I will give this land.** God would repeat these blessings and promises to Abram throughout the rest of his years. It became clear that God was promising Abram three main blessings: 1. That he would have children who would become a numerous and great nation, 2. That they would live in the land of Canaan, 3. And that all nations would be blessed through him. These were three remarkable promises by God. Abram was 75 years old, Sarai his wife was barren. Yet he would have numerous descendants who would live in the land of Canaan.

But the most important blessing that God promised Abraham is that all nations would be blessed through him. That promise was fulfilled over 2000 years later. It was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. God sent his

only Son to save the world. He gave up everything—his home in heaven. His life on the cross. His perfect life. His Father. Jesus, a physical descendent of Abraham, is our Savior. He paid for the sins of the whole world. Through Christ, this descendent of Abraham, everyone who has ever lived has been blessed.

And that includes you. Through Abram God has blessed you. You are part of the fulfillment of God's promise to Abram. God had you in mind over 4000 years ago. Through his promise you have been given the greatest gift of all. It's not something you can earn. And you certainly don't deserve it. Rather the forgiveness of sins and eternal life are given to you for free. By God's grace, his undeserved love for sinners, you have been saved.

Because of this we are willing to leave it all for Christ. We are willing to give up everything for him. We give up everything for Christ because that is what he has done for us. We realize that nothing is as precious as the faith he gives us. We know that nothing is more important than Christ and his Word. So let us follow the example of Abram and willingly drop everything if needed. If the situation calls for it, let us give up everything we have for the sake of Christ.

The cost to follow Christ is high. The Kleins didn't just lose their business because they took a stand against sin. But their lives were threatened and people told them that they hope their children would die. As Christians we must also be willing to carry our own crosses.

God asked Abram to pack up and move, not once but twice. And moving back then wasn't like it is today. It's hard enough today with packing boxes, loading them into a truck and driving wherever you are going. But back then there were no boxes. Nor any trucks. You had donkeys, perhaps some camels. You couldn't go on the internet to find out things about your new country. You didn't have any programs you help you learn the language. There was no flying in for a weekend to check things out. It was a major undertaking to move—a much greater burden than it is today.

Plus Abram was moving to a land where other people lived. Moses is quick to remind us that the Canaanites were living in the land at the time. I don't think they would have taken too kindly to someone bringing in hundreds of people and settling down in their land. No

doubt Abram had his fair share of enemies. And Abram never possessed any land in the area. But he moved from place to place for the rest of his life. Although Abram was blessed greatly by God, this wasn't easy to do. Abram suffered much. He certainly had to carry his cross.

In our gospel for today Jesus says, **anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.** The Christian cross is anything that we suffer through on account of our faith. It may be a denial of what our sinful nature wants for what God wants. So carrying our cross may be giving something up that that hinders our faith. But it can also mean bearing our burdens. It's willingly enduring persecution. As a Christian we may suffer for our faith. We may face persecution because of what we believe or what we do or refuse to do. It may come in the form of mockery, the loss of friends, abandonment from family, or losing our business. When we suffer for our faith, we are led to make a decision: do I carry my cross willingly, or do I lay it down and make my life easier?

Sadly we often don't want to carry our cross. We don't want to get mocked by our friends. So we downplay our faith, we don't talk about it and we often don't act like Christians. We don't want to lose our jobs or get overlooked for that promotion. So you go along with the sinful actions of the work place or go into work on a Sunday. Your business is being threatened because you stood up for what is right. So you back down, apologize, and you get to keep your livelihood.

The cost of following Christ is high. It's not easy. It's a long, tough road. It means carrying your cross. But that cross gets heavy. The burden seems almost too much to bear. There is only so much a Christian can take. Soon the constant nagging from family members, the put downs by your friends, the attacks from other unbelievers starts to wear on you. You don't know how much longer you can carry your cross. And you begin to think of how much easier your life would be if you put down your cross.

When we struggle with carrying our Christian Cross, all we have to do is look at Christ. We see Jesus up on top of that hill, nailed to a cross. His hands and feet pierced, for us. As painful as that was, it wasn't as painful as when Christ was forsaken by his Father. God rejected his son because Jesus became a sinner—taking our sins upon himself,

becoming guilty of everything we have done wrong. At that moment Christ suffered through the pain and agony of hell. He suffered the eternal punishment for our sins that we deserved.

Then we see Christ cry out on the cross, **It is finished.** His work of saving us was completed. Our sins were removed and paid for. His perfect life was given to us. Everything Christ needed to do was accomplished. So he bowed his head and gave up his life on the cross. But then three days later Christ's dead body was made alive once again. With the effects of the cross still seen in his hands, feet, and side, Christ assured his followers that everything is going to be ok. Salvation is now ours. Eternal life awaits.

When you struggle to carry your cross, all you have to do is look up at Christ and his cross. See your burdens that he took upon himself. Notice what he has taken away from you. And know that everything is going to be ok. For whatever cross you bear, Christ has lifted the heaviest weight for you. He bore the weight of your sins. When you struggle to carry your cross, all you have to do is look up and see Christ's empty cross. For he rose from the dead, and he lives in heaven. And you will too. There in heaven you will have a perfect life forever. And as Paul says in Romans 8:18, **I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.**

The cost of following Christ is high. But let us carry our crosses willingly. Let us give up everything that hinders us. The price is great, but the result is worth it. Let us follow the example Abram. Let us follow the example of Aaron and Melissa Klein. For no matter what happens, we know what did happen. We know that Christ bore his cross for us. And so we know that no matter what the world may do to us, we'll live in heaven forever. Amen.