

GIVING UP EXPECTATIONS**Genesis 12:1-4; John 3:1-17****(Read John 1:1-7)**

Intro: Just this week I read the story of Wilson Greatbatch. In 1956 Greatbatch was an electrical engineer with an almost completed Master's degree who was working alongside a heart doctor at the Buffalo Veteran's Administration hospital in New York. He was a natural tinkerer, and was working with the doctor on an oscillator for recording tachycardias (I didn't know what that meant so I looked it up – it is abnormally rapid heartbeat) when he inadvertently connected the wrong resistor (I don't know what that is but you electrical types out there will know). It was just a simple mistake. In the end, somehow, by what he heard coming out of the device, he realized that the lower electrical current could power what became the implantable pacemaker that we have now. Some of you might have them in your chest.

Now, Greatbatch wasn't immediately able to implant that device that he had mistakenly into the chest of a human. In fact, he had a lot of pushback from the medical community. But over the next four years he was able to experiment by putting the device in a dog, and then into a human in about 1960. It worked! Once he figured out the right kind of batteries for it and then developed them, he came up with the wonderful device that that we have today that has saved many lives.

The cool thing came at the end of the article – almost as an afterthought: It said that Mr. Greatbatch attributed the invention completely to God. He gave God all the credit for it for the rest of his life. He didn't plan to make a pacemaker that day. He wasn't expecting anything like this what resulted, but he took his mistake, and it became a powerful medical tool. The fact that he gave God all the credit indicates to me that he took what God provided and went with it. He gave up on his expectations for one medical tool, and developed an altogether more powerful tool.

Our talk today, as we continue our Lenten study entitled GIVING IT UP, is just that, Giving up Our Expectations. All of us have plans and expectations of jobs, success, marriage, children, how those children will turn out, and it's good. But what if God comes in and asks or demands a change in those plans. That's when we give up our expectations.

Erin read about Abram's call in Genesis 12 to leave Haran to continue on a journey that he had begun previously. If you peruse Genesis 11, you know that the journey prior to this had been toward Canaan, but in our text we read that God simply comes to him and says *“Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land I will show you.”* Genesis 12:1b.

That's it, that's all he says.

He's not saying where, like it's the next town down the road from Haran or maybe it was somewhere further. Instead, Abram, is embarking on an unknown journey. God interrupted his plans and changed his expectations. And in John 3, which I just read, we have Nicodemus, a well-respected and wealthy Pharisee who was also a powerful member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling body. He came to Jesus in the dark so it's obvious that he didn't want people to know he was doing it. He acknowledged that Jesus was much more than just a country bumpkin rabbi, with *“. . . we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one does these signs that you do unless God is with him.”* John 3:2b. In other words he knew that Jesus was more than he appeared, and as his discussion with him progressed, Nicodemus found out what Jesus came to offer to the world and it was far more than he could have expected or even imagined.

Let's look at both of these passages, and as we do, we can be thinking about the expectations that we have that, because it could that the Heavenly Father is speaking to us about revising our plans.

First, let's look at Abram...

God said go, and Abram went

- Sometimes giving up our expectations means stepping out into the complete unknown. As we look back, reading this from Genesis, with thousands of years intervening, it doesn't seem all that extraordinary. But, think about it, Abram was leaving everything he knew. Granted, he took along his family and his entourage, so it wasn't like it was just him and his wife, Sarai, in an old, beat-up station wagon. But here is the point, he knew Mesopotamia and he had no idea where he was going. As far as he could tell he was heading out into a trackless waste. Oh, I'm sure he'd heard from traders about this distant land, but for him it was still the unknown.

- But Abram didn't look back. Commentator, Charles Fritsch writes, "The call of God demands a response on the part of man. It is not easy to follow God. Often the real reason people do not believe in God is that they do not want to obey him. Abram is asked to leave country, relatives and family and go to, 'A land I will show you.' He is to rely entirely upon God. If Abram obeys, God will bless him. The word, "bless", is a key word in God's promise, it occurs five times in two verses."
- Listen, giving up our expectations is full of blessing. F. B. Meyer takes it a bit further. He writes, "God's commands are always associated with promises. Count the "shalls" and the "wills" here. [In Genesis 12:1-4] He does not give his reasons, but he is generous with his promises."
- Oh yes! He is generous with his promises! Russell Carter wrote a favorite old song of mine, **STANDING ON THE PROMISES**, the second verse goes like this
 Standing on the promises that cannot fail!
 When the howling storms of doubt and fear assail,
 By the living Word of God I shall prevail,
 Standing on the promises of God.
- Kathy and I have experienced this. We have stepped out into the unknown. Oh yes, we knew what it was like when we moved from Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania in 1982 and came to seminary in Ashland. We had been to Ashland before, or at least I had been. So we had expectations even if it wasn't like going to Abram's distant land. But we still didn't know exactly what it would be like. In the end, it was the most wonderful four years where we learned how a church works and how community thrives. Then in 1986, we stepped out into the unknown into our first pastorate (my previous assignment from 1980-1982 had been as a student associate pastor). Yes, we knew where we were going – we were returning to our beloved Lancaster County. But we didn't know what was going to be like to be a pastor and wife. We soon found out – it wasn't a picnic. Then we made another move, and then another move, and then another as we came here almost 21 years ago. All of them were to places that we knew about. But they were an unknown place in that each one was a different set of circumstances and people. We had expectations, and God exceeded them every time.
- Abram heard God and said yes and you can read about his journey with God for the next almost 14 chapters in Genesis. Then you read about him in the New Testament where he is referred to as the friend of God. He was a tremendously flawed person – just like you and me, but he was a faithful person and he was the friend of God. What a way to be remembered!
- Abram gave up on his expectations and God blessed him and humanity as a result. Nicodemus had different expectations when he came to Jesus in the night. . .

Nicodemus came to Jesus because he genuinely wanted to learn

- Nicodemus was a religious leader and a key member of the Pharisees. When you get a chance study the Pharisees you might be like me and think we have often been unfair to them over the centuries. They were regular people who studied the written Law of Moses and oral law of the Prophets. In a way they get a bad rap because they are seen, often justifiably, as legalists, but they had sincere hopes to be able to bring the Jewish people – that is, the people of God – around to a vital belief in God. Their sincerity was tempered a little bit by the fact that they had an ulterior motive – they wanted to convert the people of God to holiness because they believed that once all Jews were faithfully following Jehovah, the Kingdom of Israel would be restored. So it was a religious and political movement that endeavored to keep people walking in the straight and narrow. So it is not surprising that Jesus's teaching came into conflict with what they were teaching. It's also obvious that they were a bit jealous of the attention that this rabbi from Galilee was getting.
- This was all in Nicodemus's mind as he came to meet with Jesus and I can picture that Jesus looked at him with great tenderness because he knew the risk this man was taking and also his desire to walk closer to God. In Mark 10, there's an account, that can be found in other gospels as well, where a rich young religious leader comes up to Jesus and asks him what he must do to have eternal life? Jesus replies to him with a simple prescription to basically follow the Law with faithfulness. The young man responds that he's done all that. Jesus's response. Listen, *And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one*

thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me. Mark 10:21 He looked at him and loved him! Talk about expectations, that's not what this rich young was expecting. It says in the following verse that the rich young man was indeed very rich, and he hung his head and walked away. As Jesus gives his directives to us, he looks at us and he loves us and I picture the same thing as he's talking to Nicodemus.

- He doesn't waste any time, he tells it like it is, *“Truly truly I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”* John 3:3. This must have bent his mind and it definitely wasn't what Nicodemus was expecting. He takes Jesus literally that he needed to be born again as a baby which he knew was physically impossible. So Jesus patiently replies, and I'm paraphrasing this, “You're a teacher of the law and you teach what the law says. When the law is a bit puzzling, you work on it with your colleagues and you come up with what you believe Moses meant when he wrote it down.” But the issue is not what Moses meant, instead, it's what God requires. He requires that we be born again.
- But it's not nearly as difficult as Nicodemus pictures in his mind's eye. Jesus proceeds to give him The Gospel in a Nutshell. We know it as John 3:16 – it came from Jesus and not from Tim Tebow's eye black. He gave it to Nicodemus straight from his heart. *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.* John 3:16.
- That's not what Nicodemus expected. In fact it was definitely more than he expected, and better than he expected. And most of all, **it was what he needed.** Jesus wasn't finished, *For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.* John 3:17
- This was not a plan for political restoration of the Kingdom of Israel. It was a plan for all of humanity to be born again. The God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses, of David, and of Nicodemus, had a plan for the salvation of **ALL** people. It's what we all need.
- God's promise to Abraham that all humanity would be blessed through him came through. Abraham never expected that, but here it was coming to fruition to Nicodemus and all of humanity. **WHOEVER BELIEVES will not perish!** We don't deserve that, and we certainly, at one time or another didn't expect it. But it's so.
- As I close, ask this of yourself. . . **What expectations do you need to give up? Amen.**