

10.15.2023 Sermon

Where Have You Settled?

Genesis 11:27-12:5

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Canaan, moving, settled, Abram, stopped, Tara, dishes, god, set, talking, put, achievable, Sarai, feel, years, write, harangue, held, life, land

SPEAKERS

Rev. Dr. Tracy Saletta

You know, this is one of my verses that is a go-to verse. So, we are preaching and choose your own adventure. There are certain verses that I have, that I've always wanted to preach on, but we've just never landed there. This is one of them. I actually was in a conversation with Pastor Bob once, and he talked about this verse. And I went, "Oh, my Lord, there's something in there."

It just stood out to me that it's been years. Recently, I'm going back through Genesis, and I read this verse again, and I thought, "This is what I want to preach." It's so simple, and it's so short, but we're gonna go for it because I think it's also so profound. So, let's turn on if you have a Bible. If not, you can look it up on your phone or just look up. We're going to start in Genesis 11 Verse 27.

This is the account of Tara. I saw a shadow and thought somebody was coming behind me, I'm sorry. Tara became the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Haran became the father of Lot. While his father Tara was still alive, Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans in the land of his birth. Abram and Nahor were both married; the name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milka. She was the daughter of Haran, the father of both Milka and Iscah. Now, Sarai was barren and she had no children.

Tara took his son Abram, his grandson Lot, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram. Together, they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there. Tara lived 205 years, and he died in Haran. What's fascinating is

that this is Tara's life in two paragraphs. They were going to Canaan, but when they came to Haran, they settled. Hold on to that.

Genesis 12 starts with the Lord saying 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. I will bless you, make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you, I will curse. All the peoples on earth will be blessed through you." Abram left as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was 75 years old when he set out from Haran. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated, and the people they had acquired in Haran. They set out for the land of Canaan and arrived there.

What's interesting about this story is Tara's decision. Why did he stop in Haran when Canaan was his goal? If he had continued to Canaan, how might things have been different? Where in our life do we settle? When I reflect on this, God called Abram out of Haran to Canaan, which was the very place Tara felt he should go. In our lives, where do we get complacent, tired, or simply stop moving? Sometimes, we might stop to recharge, only to become comfortable and halt our progress. I'm not talking about significant milestones but small decisions that we let slide, causing us to drift from our original intent.

So, what's your Haran? Where in your life have you stopped or settled? Today, I hope to guide us through areas in our life where we might have paused. It's not about dreams, promises, or even vision. God often moves in subtle ways. Tara felt the call to Canaan, but he settled in Haran. We sometimes become too settled in our routines. As Matt once mentioned in our elders' discussion, we shouldn't become too fixed in one spot but keep moving. Where have you paused in your journey?

Consider the dishes at my home. If I don't wash them right after eating, they pile up. Although I detest doing dishes, I do them because it's a small act of responsibility, a reminder not to settle but to keep moving.

Even though this is hard and even though this is something that is difficult for me to do, I'm going to pick up that first dish and I'm going to start to move. "Where is your Haran?" And you know, it's so interesting because, to me, the whole imagery of the tabernacle in the desert and the whole imagery of the Old Testament is about movement.

But what we do as Christians is we want to set up house; we want to build a building. And that's what the Israelites said, "We don't like walking in the desert anymore. God, can we build you a structure?" And God said, "I never asked you for a structure." But we build these

structures. "Where have you settled in Haran when God is inviting you to continue to move to Canaan?" God is inviting you to keep putting one foot in front of the other and keep moving. So, this is what I want to do. I want to hand out little cards. "Do you have the cards? Okay." And I want us to look at different areas in our life. "Could you put the next slide up?" These are just a few areas. We could have stopped moving in personal development, taking care of our mental health, location, maybe it is where we live, physical, our health, our weight, exercises that we used to go to the gym, or we used to walk, and all of a sudden, we stop.

Our career, hobbies that we used to love to do but all of a sudden, we just stopped one day, we just kind of left it. Or our spiritual growth, our soul development. How about just being nice, being a good person, being a team player, being a gracious person? Maybe it's travel, education, giving, injustice, all of these different areas. Maybe it's devotionals, serving, drawing, painting, praying, writing. Just all of these different areas in our life.

I want to invite us to walk through the areas of our life and to prayerfully ask God, where have I set a tent and laid the pegs when I'm supposed to still be moving? Does that make sense? I believe in the depths of my soul that God is always whispering to us Keep moving. Keep going. Don't stop.

So, I'm going to ask whoever's at the back, put on a little music. I'm going to give us about five minutes to sit at the thing. These cards are important. Write down on these cards. If there's an area in your life where you feel like you've stopped, that's alright. If you feel, "I'm still moving," that's fine. You don't have to do anything. But I'd like you to take a moment to write down where your Harun is. Where do you feel you've settled in an area of your life, even when God is whispering, "keep going"?

Notice that he was 75 years old. Regardless of how old or young you are, God is timeless, ever vibrant like spring. Don't stop. There is always God's purpose and vision for our life. No matter our age, God's attention is always there, urging us not to set up camp but to keep moving, one day at a time. Life is radiant, and the invitation is always there.

What we have in the Old Testament is truly special. I deeply believe that the Old Testament, in its entirety, speaks of movement and the importance of moving forward. In the gospels, like Ephesians, Thessalonians, and Peter, we are consistently invited to remain alert and to pray. God continually says, "Be alert. Be open. Listen to my voice." It's crucial for us to stay in that space of attentiveness, being present in the now, proactively seeking God, and being vigilant.

It's so easy to become complacent in today's world. To just turn on Netflix or any other platform and lose ourselves. It's so effortless to get cozy and become inactive. Over time, the whispers that encourage perseverance can fade because we lose our focus, determination, vision,

goals, and dreams. We forget that our lives revolve around the choices we make. It's not solely about God wielding some magic over us; it's about us partnering with God, being attuned, and living our lives with intention.

So, what do we do next? "Do you have the papers, honey? You've been so busy today. Oh, you all received them already? That's great. David, did you distribute them? Only this side got them? The other side doesn't have them? Dave was ahead of the game. If you don't have them, never mind, just forget what I mentioned. This is precisely why I cherish us. I'm offering you this practical tool. There was a time in my life when I'd pray about certain things, and then I'd just wait for God to act.

And then one day, many years ago, I had an epiphany. Oh, wait, I pray about it, then I got to do it. Right. There are practical tools that we have in this world that help us do things. This is about the SMART goals. I want you to review what you've written and choose one that stands out to you. One that you want to look at and work on. Take that and write it down on this piece of paper as a specific goal.

What's crucial about this goal is that it must be achievable. That's the "A" in SMART. So, don't set a target like waking up at five every morning and running three miles seven days a week. That's unrealistic. Instead, it can be something simpler, like deciding that in the upcoming week, you'll make a doctor's appointment or start reading a book.

Your goal should be specific, well-defined, clear, and unambiguous. This means it shouldn't be vague but rather straightforward. Additionally, it should be measurable, allowing you to check it off once achieved. Besides being achievable, it should also be realistic and have a clearly defined timeline. This means you should include both a start date and a target date.

Take another three minutes. I'll give you either three or five minutes, depending on how things progress. Write down one thing based on what you've already penned. Once done, we'll have music. But remember, we aren't finished. I want you to consider this SMART goal and work on it throughout the year. Before we proceed, as I was speaking, Miss Cindy had an insight. She'd like to share it.

Miss Cindy...

Good morning again. My mind often wanders, and it's not always towards spiritual matters. As Pastor Tracy was speaking, I recalled a song that resonates with how I live my life. It's by McFadden and Whitehead and is titled "Ain't No Stopping Us Now." I'm not sure of the year it was released, but its lyrics echo in my life. I wish I could sing it for you, but the chorus goes: "Ain't no stopping us. Now we're on the move. Ain't no stopping us. Now we've got the groove."

The song speaks of overcoming challenges and moving forward with determination. Even if I'm unsure of the journey ahead, the song reminds me not to let anything stand in my way and to keep forging ahead.

Tracy Saletta...

I can see you're yearning to sing that! Here's what I propose: let's have a moment at the altar. Reflect on the things you've written, especially the areas where you've settled or hesitated. Bring them to the altar. In God's presence, make a declaration: "Ain't no stopping me now." Let this be your commitment to keep moving forward. Hand over these written pieces to God, asking Him to keep that determination alive in your heart. Can we do that? Let's spend a few minutes doing this. Approach the altar in the manner you're comfortable with – kneel, stand, or simply come forward. Leave your written commitments at the altar as a symbolic gesture, signifying to God that you're moving forward with your goals.