Every sermon should be based in the Bible. God’s Word is what worship and praying and fellowship is all about. Today I invite you to turn your attention to the Book of Genesis, chapter 12. This passage is familiar and is a reminder of the beginning of the history of the Jewish people and how it relates to Abraham. We know the story. Abraham lived in Ur of the Chaldees with his wife Sarah and his family. This passage of scripture tells us a few things we need to remember. First, it tells us that Abraham and God were on good speaking terms. Second, it tells us that God spoke to Abraham and He told him the truth. Third, God told Abraham that he would be a blessing to many. Fourth, God told Abraham that all the people of the earth would be blessed through him. This is a key passage on understanding the history of the Jewish people for the story of the Jewish people would lead us to Jesus and the need all the people of the world have in relating properly to God.

For Abraham and Sarah it was a time of transition. I can imagine that picture of Abraham coming in to Sarah and telling her they were going to take a trip. Probably like most wives she was excited and wanted to know where they were going. Abraham did not know.

Sixty-two years ago a group of people led and inspired by the Woodland Heights Baptist Church felt the need to start a church in Bon Air. The first Huguenot Bridge was just five years old, and Bon Air had been a sleepy area just outside Richmond where Richmonders would come from the inner city to smell the fresh air and enjoy the beauty of Bon Air.

God blessed and led that small group of people and they began to grow. Phil Rodgerson gave the right leadership for a new church and set some good guidelines and helped us get started on the right foot. The first meeting was in the Bon Air Community Center building and it later burned down. They must have had some powerful “hell fire and brimstone” preaching. In 1954 the first building was built on this property. Phil instilled in us a love of missions that still exists, and we are known throughout Baptist circles as a “mission minded church.” Bob Cochran came in 1967 to serve as pastor. He gave the leadership we needed as a friend and pastor and guided us forward. I joined Bon Air when Bob was pastor, thirty-three years ago, and my goal was to be his cheerleader and support him. For over twenty years Bob met the spiritual needs of our young congregation, and we became a lighthouse in Bon Air and Richmond. Bob married the lovers and buried the dead and the church attracted many young families who are still here providing good leadership in all phases of our church life.

Jim Pardue came in 1988 to serve as pastor and was God’s man at the helm for 14 years until his retirement in 2001. Jim was an excellent preacher and teacher and gave us what we needed for that important chapter in our church’s history. Jim helped us in our building program, and if we did not have the facility we have today, we would not be the church we are today. He kept our focus on missions and...
he initiated multiple services, including The Gathering, which we continue to have today. Our staff grew and the number of missionaries who have a deep history here at Bon Air grew. In these past 62 years God has called out over 75 young people and adults to serve as ministers, missionaries and teachers for His kingdom’s work.

In 2002 the church called Travis Collins to serve as pastor and for almost 12 years Travis provided leadership reaching out to young adults and helping us establish multi-site campuses, create a multi-ethnic mentality, mobilize our members for greater service, have a Mejor Mañana, a better tomorrow, as we face the future, and at the same time keep our mission mindset as we seek to lead people to live transformed lives. We have called these emphases our “M and Ms.” These were all church approved emphases as we worked together, worshipped together and sought to bring the lost to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior.

Each of our pastors has served us well. They have all been different and blessed with unique gifts and skills. Each pastor has loved the Lord and wanted others to love the Lord also.

From time to time it is good to review our history and remind ourselves where we have come from. Our Jewish friends do this well as they observe their Seder meal each Passover. We all have a responsibility to pass along to those coming after us the importance of our heritage and history. An old Jewish proverb says that if we do not learn from the past we will be forced to re-live the past in order to learn the lessons God wants us to learn. If we only look back we will never move forward.

When I compare Abraham and his time of transition with the transitions we have faced here at Bon Air these past 62 years, I think there are several conclusions we can draw.

**First**, God has been on His throne these past 62 years just like He was with Abraham, and He is still in charge of all we do. Abraham and God were on good terms and we must also strive to be on good terms with God.

**Second**, as God spoke to Abraham He speaks to us and He speaks truth. God tells us what we should do, where we should go and how we should act. Truth is an interesting word. The Bible tells us that Jesus is truth and He says “I am the way, the truth and the life.”

**Third**, as God told Abraham he would be a blessing to many, He tells us the same thing today. We have been a blessing to many and we will continue to be a blessing to many. Many of you are here today because this church has been a blessing to you and your family.

**Fourth**, the challenge that through Abraham all the people of the earth would be blessed is still a challenge to the Bon Air Baptist Church. We have a message the world needs to hear if we understand the power of what we know and believe there is no stopping what we can do.

I have some practical observation to make. Some people are scared of an interim period. There is some uncertainty and some are not sure where we are going. Let me remind us all that this is God’s church and not man’s church. If we acknowledge who is in charge we will be okay. If we are unsure who is in charge and have a power struggle we are in trouble and the devil is happy.
Some are afraid that attendance will drop off and financial support will slip. Let me remind you that when Bob Woodward was our interim pastor, between Bob Cochran and Jim Pardue, we actually grew in membership. There is always some moving around between churches. Bon Air has received members from sister churches and we have lost members to other churches. Much of this is just natural movement of people and their interests and desires. The devil plants seeds of doubt in our minds and he wants to confuse us. I refuse to be confused. I am completely committed to what God is doing here. We must all strive to serve Him faithfully. We have had people join our church every Sunday since Travis Collins left as our pastor. We must not sit back and do nothing.

If I were 45-50 years of age and looking for a church to join, I would be much more attracted to a church that had members who loved each other and were faithful in attendance and giving than a church that threw it into neutral and kept spinning their wheels waiting to see what would happen.

I do not believe this a time to start and launch new programs and initiatives. We have much going on now and what we have going is enough to keep us busy. I believe we have the best youth program of any church I know. Mac Jordan is dynamite and the envy of many churches in providing a role model for youth and leading in a spiritually based, Biblical program of activities and challenges for our youth. It is not easy being a young person today. Peer pressure and the temptations of our culture and society make this an interesting time in which to worship and serve together. One of the biggest problems in our culture today is that many moms and dads have shirked their duties and responsibilities as parents and have left the role models to sports figures, movie stars, politicians, the government and even the church. Many parents have not been the parents God intended them to be.

We have the best music program I know. Jim Ailor is God’s man who directs our music program with gentle leadership, spiritual depth and quality music. Music enhances worship and worship helps us to grow spiritually. Good music is based on good theology and the hymns of our faith inspire us as they have fellow Christians through many centuries. Music lifts our souls to God and most of us could do a lot more exercising by the lifting of our souls to Him.

We have a children’s program that sets an excellent example of what a church is supposed to do in working with children. Deb Upton, Kim Boswell and Peggy Moore and their fellow workers are dedicated to all we do and are the envy of many other churches. Our preschool reaches out and touches the lives of many families as we give a Christian foundation to these young and precious lives. Our multi-site campuses provide outreach to people in our community who would never come to our Buford Road campus. John Sawyer at our James River Campus, Jake Maxwell at Bon Air @ the Village, and Les Venable and Alberto Jimenez at Robious Hall has such energy and enthusiasm and passion about what they are doing it is tiring to see them working so hard. Through small groups, food pantries, clothes closets, Bible studies and prayer meetings we stay busy and this is good. Someone said in order to be a Baptist you have to be in good health because there is so much going on you have to be in good shape just to keep up. Our Prison Ministry reaches out and touches the lives of people who may not have a friend, and we tell them about Jesus. Often people are released from prison, having served their time, and they have no place to turn and they need to know Jesus more than ever. We have people regularly who minister through our Prison Ministry. This is good.
Our Care Ministry reaches out to touch people in a time of need. It may be sickness, decision making time, a time of death, dealing with aging parents or new babies, getting married or needing counseling. Let me assure you that during this time of transition, our shut-ins will be visited and the pastoral care needs of our church will be carried out. At Bon Air the Bible is studied and good fellowship is shared as we work and serve together. I am not a part and will never be a part of a church that gripes and complains about things all the time. That is not what we are about.

Just this week our church approved a Transition Team that will be helping guide us through this interim period. We have some wonderful, mature, God fearing men and women who will help us through this exciting period of transition. If you want to know what you can do to help, my answer is PRAY. When God’s people pray, great things result.

We must never forget that God has a plan of salvation for every person in Bon Air and around the world. The Bible says I am a sinner and we all have fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23 – All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God). The Bible also says I must confess my sins and He will forgive my sins (Psalm 32:5 - “I will confess my sins to the Lord and He will forgive my sins”). I must believe in Jesus (Acts 16:31 – Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved) and I must follow Him faithfully ( Luke 9:23 – If any man would come after me let him take up his cross daily and follow me).

The paradox of the gospel is that it is very easy and very difficult to follow Jesus. Many times we are not as far away as we think we are.

As a young boy I was at church every time the doors were open. I was in the youth choir, youth group, R.A.s, mission groups and anything else that could keep me busy at church. I had an R.A. leader, Mrs. Kirkland, who was wonderful. This was back in the day when the WMU knew how to lead boys and set a great example for all of us young and often wild boys. I took a liking to Mrs. Kirkland who was probably near 50 at the time, but she liked me and I liked her. She led us in mission activities, Bible memory work and R.A. camp every summer. I went to our R.A. meeting because of her. One day she came to our meeting and announced that she was leaving because her husband was being transferred to another city. I was devastated and went home and announced to my parents I was never going back to R.A.s again. I might even stop going to church. If Mrs. Kirkland was not going to be there I saw no reason to go. Somehow that word got back to Mrs. Kirkland and she came to see me and we had a heart to heart talk. She looked me in the eye and asked me if I was a Christian. I told her I was. Then she said to me, “Norman, I am disappointed in you. I thought you came to R.A.s because you loved Jesus and wanted to serve Him.” I could feel tears rolling down my cheeks because I thought so much of Mrs. Kirkland. All of a sudden I felt as if God was speaking directly to me, and I knew she was right. I did not go to R.A.s merely because of Mrs. Kirkland but because of my commitment to God and the desire to serve Jesus.

That day I had an epiphany and I came to realize the church is bigger than any one individual, and my commitment to God through Jesus Christ was what mattered. I have never been the same since that day.

Abraham said to Sarah, “Come on, honey, we are going to take a trip and it is going to be exciting and challenging and we are going to be fine.” They took that trip and their future was bright and through Abraham many people have been blessed. Did they have problems? Absolutely! Did they have challenges? They sure did. Did they grow as children of God? Yes, and in ways they never imagined.
The same potential is at our doorstep, and when we walk by faith, we shall grow to become what God wants us to become. May God bless us as we grow together?