

# Caught Up

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Date: 28 January 2018

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, good evening everybody. It's great to see you all here and thank you so much Jamie for leading that time of worship. That was really excellent. Hi, my name's Tim Foster. Just in case you've never met me before, I'm an intern here and occasionally I have the great privilege of opening God's Word here.

I came across the story of Charles Lightoller recently. He was a second officer of the RMS Titanic, the highest ranking officer that survived that disaster in the North Atlantic.

And during that disaster, it was he who was in charge of the lifeboats and who enabled so many passengers to escape the sinking ship.

Not only that, he served as an officer in the British Navy during the First World War and was decorated many times and retired with the rank of commander.

Not doing so badly as an interesting life goes. But many of you will know a later episode of his life from the recent film Dunkirk, where he inspired the character Mr. Dawson.

[ 1 : 12 ] As a retired man, he had bought a private motor boat, a motor yacht, sorry, which was licensed to carry 21. I'm sure boat enthusiasts would have my head.

Early in the Second World War, of course, the British and the French were pushed back to Dunkirk by the German forces. And from there, so many of us, it's such a familiar story.

A hasty evacuation was executed. But there was a problem. The larger Navy ships couldn't get close to the shallow beaches, sandy beaches.

And because the evacuation required smaller boats, many small boats from the south coast of England were requisitioned by the Navy. Some were crewed by sailors from the Navy.

But there weren't enough sailors. And some, like the sundown or that vessel that you see on the PowerPoint there. This man's boat.

[ 2 : 13 ] They were taken by their civilian owners. They saw a boat. They saw a need and knowing full well the danger of sailing straight into a battle zone.

They took their lives in their hands and they went to rescue the stranded armies from the beaches of Normandy. Charles Lightoller, aided by two younger men, saved 130 men from that war zone on a boat supposed to carry 21.

Like Commander Lightoller, we are going to follow in the footsteps of an old man who bravely waded into a war zone to rescue those who were helplessly longing for aid.

And we find this story in Genesis chapter 14. I'm going to invite Brenna up to come and to read it for us. It'd be useful if you had a Bible to open it in front of you because we're going to read it in three sections throughout the night.

So keep it open in front of you if you can. Brenna, please. Thank you very much for saving me from saying those words.

[ 3 : 25 ] So we find folks caught up in war. That's what we find first of all, isn't it? Two weeks ago, we saw Abraham coming back on track after his failure in Egypt.

He'd failed to trust God, remember, and made a mess. But God had brought him back both physically and spiritually to where he was in a relationship with God.

And as we turn the chapter, aren't we a little surprised by what we find? The style and the content of what we've read is remarkably different. From everything else that we've read in Genesis so far, it feels almost like the Bible maker accidentally slipped a page of Kings into the middle of Genesis.

The focus has moved away from our chosen man and his family. And the spotlight has landed on this massive geopolitical situation between some of the nations and city-states that would have dominated the news of the day.

And perhaps Abraham still got copies of the Ur-Chronical forwarded from his hometown. And perhaps they would have had headlines like this.

[ 4 : 39 ] We read about an alliance that's existed for 12 years where this king, Kederleomar, has ruled the roost. He is the superpower of his day.

He is the top dog. But in year 13, there is rebellion. And in year 14, we read that Kederleomar with his three allies come sweeping into roughly the area of modern Israel.

And they defeat everyone that they find. That list of horrible names in 5 and 6 and 7, that's six victories that this eastern coalition of kings win.

And then in verse 8, we come to the battle that is the main focus of the campaign. The five kings from the south end of the Dead Sea, they ally together, they sally forth, and they meet these four foreign kings against whom they've rebelled.

But the battle doesn't even seem to be a contest. The kings of the valley and their armies flee and are scattered. And the foreign kings gobble up their well-won plunder and set off back to their countries.

[ 6 : 01 ] But notice that here in verse 12, we discover why this whole situation has become the focus of the biblical narrative. This wasn't a mistake that this happens to be here.

Lot, who chose the valley of Jordan as his residence at the end of chapter 13, has moved south and into Sodom itself.

And though he evidently hasn't taken part in the battle, he's not a soldier, otherwise this wouldn't have happened to him. But he's been taken captive by these victorious kings.

And at this stage, we have some serious questions to ask of the story. Is that it for Lot? If this was a TV show, the episode would end here and we'd be left wondering, was he just an additional cast member who could easily be written out whenever the situation required it?

Did the actor playing Lot get some better deal on another show? Maybe a starring role? And it raises some real questions in our hearts about God's care and his ability to intervene in real life.

[ 7 : 17 ] Does God see what's happening here? Does God see what's happening to Lot? Does he really care about this family? But thankfully, we can read the next episode and find out what happens next.

I'll hand back to Brenna just for a short reading. Fantastic. Thank you. A fortunate escapee from the war makes it to Abraham.

And we see that although Lot was caught up in war, these kings get caught up to by Abraham. We find at the beginning that he settled into his new surroundings.

But this news from this man rouses him from his business and causes him to muster his people together. Bear in mind here that Abraham's around the age of 80.

He has had his fill perhaps with his nephew. Perhaps if we were in Abraham's shoes, we would be tempted to let this situation go down as a terrible family tragedy that just couldn't be helped.

[ 8 : 31 ] I mean, let's think about this for a minute. He got caught up in a war that's nothing to do with us. Like, come on, Lot, you shouldn't have done that.

The foreign armies are far in excess of my power. I'm just a businessman. No, no, I'm not going to get involved. They've already turned back and headed home. They'll be halfway back to her before I get on my horse.

It will be no point in even trying. Not to mention that, well, I gave Lot the choice. And he chose to go near these people of Sodom.

And we knew that they were bad company. And I'm sure I told them many times not to deal with them. He should have known better than to live in their city. The possible excuses that Abraham could have gave are plausible.

But Abraham doesn't respond to Lot's situation with apathy or concern for personal comfort even. Rather, he's moved.

[ 9 : 37 ] By compassion and duty, he marshals his resources and he uses them graciously. He's about to get stuck into a situation that all of us would rather avoid if possible.

Who of us would run willingly into war? And this has been a real challenge to me. I, like many of you, am very shy to jump into other people's problems.

But here we see a clear example of what we're then taught in the New Testament time and time again. Of advocating for.

Of standing up for. Of fighting for those who are helpless in their situations. And that's going to look different for you and me than Abram's armed warfare, right?

I don't expect to have to strap on a sword and get the chainmail on. I doubt I'm going to have to raid a house to rescue somebody. But people like the International Justice Mission do it regularly as part of their work as Christians.

[10:52] Likewise, I may not offer help to a struggling mum to keep house. But some of you do. And that's part of this as well.

As are the phone calls for some of the basics bank clients that Fiona does so often. For people who maybe have their credit stopped unjustly or get unreasonable demands.

And so are the hours that some of you spend chatting to brothers and sisters who've lost their way. Gotten ensnared in sin and in difficulties.

And so the challenge comes back to me. Are there situations I can be getting involved in? Is there anything that I can do to help these people?

Being a rich man in the ancient Near East, Abram traveled with a village of people around him. It wasn't three or four folk on a donkey in a single tent. If Abram came near you, you would know it.

[11:56] There would be a village pop-up overnight. If he came to stay near you. And as part of his household, we read there are 318 trained men.

Plus, imagine all their families. Plus, imagine all their stuff. And as well as his own force, there are these three Amorite brothers who are his allies.

And they go with him to rescue Lot. And together they race to catch up with these kings. Abram is, without a doubt, less experienced in battle.

He's a less experienced commander than these kings who have wreaked havoc in the country. He probably has fewer soldiers. Although we don't know that for sure.

But certainly his soldiers will have been much less experienced in battle. And quite probably, they're less well armed. They're his own personal security men.

[12:52] These aren't a country's army. These are just his folk. But this same Abram, 80 years old, with every odd against him, he leads a daring night attack.

He splits his army into two and routes the enemy completely. He chases them far into modern Syria before turning back, having captured the spoils of war that was taken from Sodom.

Not least, he successfully rescued Lot. I wonder if that was the reason he went so far after them.

And I don't think we can underestimate God's hand in the victory that Abram won here.

That a man without any history of war, successfully routed and scattered enemies whose power was renowned in the area. This guy Kederleomer, he successfully held together a coalition of nations that stretched from the Gulf of Persia to the Mediterranean Sea.

This was no half-bent king. This was no pushover. And yet this 80-year-old shepherd, with his few hundred men, managed to win.

[14:14] This was definitely not down to Abram's skill. This was only but for God's input. But Abram's trials have only begun. And there's going to be another test of his both abilities and allegiances.

And so can we read together the final section of Genesis 14 together? Thanks, Brenna. Thank you so much. We've seen Lot get caught up in war and Abram with him.

We've seen Abram catching up to these kings. Now there's this question. Is he going to get caught up in politics? Coming back victoriously from battle, Abram is met by the king of Sodom.

Possibly the same one who fled from the battle or possibly his new successor. It isn't quite clear if he survived his encounter with the tar pit. Either way, we ought to be wary of this character.

In chapter 13, the author of Genesis gave us a little breadcrumb. He talked about these people of Sodom as being exceedingly wicked. And there's a little bit of apprehension here.

[15:27] We're wondering, what is this meeting going to come out with? But right in the middle of the meeting, just as you expect the important thing to be discussed.

Just as there's a little bit of talk. In comes this other character who we've never met before. And he just comes out of nowhere.

Mochizedek, the king of Salem. And he comes and he sets out this feast for Abraham. And we learn that this king is also a priest of God Most High.

And he does a very strange thing. He blesses Abraham. This man who's been chosen by God. And who is God's chosen person.

You expect him to be going around doing the blessing. But no. No, this random character, Mochizedek. This odd individual. He blesses Abram. And he reminds him of some key truths. [16:29] Truths that we too need reminded of. The God that you have a relationship, He isn't a local deity. He's not one of many. No, no.

He doesn't have a peer. It's not that He's in amongst a pantheon. This God, He owns everything. He possesses everything.

Nothing is not His. The battle you just won, Abram. The battle you just won. God did that. You think you won that battle because of strategy.

Or because of strength. Or because of the situation. Think again. God controlled the strategy. The strength and the situation. God did it.

Not you. Isn't that a great God to have on your side? Abram could have been offended at that. He could have heard that and thought, This is some firebrand preacher.

[17:26] Not going to listen to him. Much more. As could we. But he recognized the truth when it was spoken. And he gives Melchizedek 10% of everything.

Abram is recognizing that this priest is God's representative. He is speaking God's word. And Abram is showing his allegiance to God by giving him his stuff.

And we're left to wonder why that's happened. And then immediately the king of Sodom cuts back in. Almost as if he's trying to stamp on the toes of Melchizedek to get him out of the road.

And he proposes this deal to Abram. He offers Abram everything gained in the battle. In exchange for the people that were rescued.

It's a great deal Abram isn't it? But Abram outright rejects the proposal. He sees something in this offer that is dangerous.

[18:31] And perhaps as we dig into this we'll understand why Melchizedek has shown up here too. Abram's response is that he has taken an oath. He's not just said it in his head.

He's not just rejecting the deal. I have taken an oath. Not even to take like not even a thread. Like one of my guy's uniforms got a bit battered on the way.

And we took a thread to patch it up. Not even a sandal strap. Like I didn't even take a shoelace from among the spoils. He wasn't even going to take the smallest expense from Sodom's hoard.

Why? Because it would be held over him. He wouldn't even take reimbursement for the fuel.

Because there was a danger involved in being an ally of Sodom.

Abraham was all too aware that strings were attached to this. And Sodom, he wouldn't be afraid to pull them at the right time.

[19:34] Abram didn't stop his allies from taking their share of the plunder. Notice at the end, he wasn't making laws for them to follow. But he was setting himself apart from the profit that was offered to him.

Because he was acutely aware of the fact that he had been set apart by God. And here we begin to realize what's going on. Notice there's two kings in this section.

Offering two very different proposals. On the one hand, we have Sodom with his offer of wealth. But the hidden agenda of an alliance that would come back maybe to haunt Abram.

On the other hand, we have Salem. And Salem offers a free banquet and a free blessing with its hard truths. And he demands nothing but freely gives.

This whole situation is a test of Abram's allegiances. The question is being asked, will he get caught up in the politics of the region by joining Sodom?

[20:41] Or will he remain focused on his purpose as God's chosen ambassador to the world? And as we see this struggle in Abram's situation, the very same question comes to us in different ways.

Though we're never quite in a situation like this. If you ever meet two kings in the one day, please tell me I want to run in the circles that you run in. Although we're never in a situation quite like this. Yet the same test is a very real test that many of us will face repeatedly along the same lines. In our workplaces, in our classrooms, even in our own homes and in our own minds.

We will come across this repeated challenge. Will we accept the offer of this world? Or will we choose to remain allied to God?

This isn't just making a commitment. Reading our Bibles and keeping ourselves clean. That's not what I mean by allegiance to God. For some of us, this will entail a very practical thing.

[21:50] Not taking a promotion in work. Because you know what? God's gifted me and given me ministries to take part of in church. And actually they need me.

Rather than this promotion, which will put more responsibilities on me, strain my time and take me away. For some of us, this will mean taking an unpopular position among our peers.

And standing up and being the odd one out. But for all of us, this will mean putting God first in our priorities. Doing uncomfortable things that the folk around us will not understand.

The offer of Sodom was, I am sure, tempting. It would have been easy to accept. And I speak as one who struggles to overcome temptation.

But too often, we just try to excuse ourselves. We just explain ourselves away. We don't take enough care about our allegiance to God to take action in these situations.

[ 23 : 00 ] But note something here. Because sometimes this is taken too far. Note that in the face of temptation, Abram did not retreat from living a real life among normal people.

Both the decision to get involved with these warring kings and the decision to have nothing to do with the king of Sodom came out of Abram's understanding of his call.

His stance was neither retreat from all contact, nor was it getting involved with everything that the world is involved in. He rescued Lot.

He dealt graciously towards him. He rescued him from this hopeless situation. Yet, he denied any allegiance or indebtedness to Sodom.

Sure that God would instead provide everything that he needed. And instead of accepting Sodom's offer, he accepted the blessing of Sodom.

[ 24 : 02 ] And he gave to Sodom richly in return. If this isn't an incredible picture of what it means to live out God's calling in our lives, I'm not sure what is.

I'm going to finish in just a minute. But maybe we need to think about how we're engaged in the situations and relationships that are close to our hearts. Perhaps we need to confess where we have failed to be wholeheartedly focused on our mission.

And perhaps we've formed relationships and alliances that don't match up to what God would have for us. Perhaps we have the opposite problem.

Perhaps we are finding ourselves overwhelmed with the situations of our friends and our family members. And we're desperate to know how to respond to them. Can we take a minute before I hand back to the band, to Jamie.

Jamie is the band. Before I hand back to Jamie. And can we bring these things to our God just for a minute? And I'll pray just as we close. God most high, you are truly the possessor of heaven and earth.

[ 25 : 17 ] And we ask you to give us all that we need. We recognize that victory is not assured by our strength or our abilities, but by you.

And we bring before you all that is in our hearts. Coming with confidence that you have heard us because of Jesus who stands before you. Would you glorify yourself in our lives and enable us to live out the gospel as your people here on earth.

Who are wholeheartedly caught up in our calling and who rely completely on you. Help us, we pray. In Jesus name. Amen.

Amen.