

Genesis 12:2-3 11-28-21

Blessed Blessers

Galatians 3:26-29 *In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.* Father Abraham had many sons, many sons had father Abraham and I am one of them, and so are you – if you are living by faith in Christ. This is the teaching of Paul in Romans and in Galatians. The apostle connects very closely the saints of the new covenant with those of the old covenant who looked to Abraham as their great forefather. This is why, despite the appeals of some, we cannot neglect what God says in the Old Testament Scriptures. Those Scriptures form the foundation for what we find in the New Testament and without them our understanding of the gospel will be severely lacking.

So, for today, I lead us back to the book of Genesis, to the initial calling of God to Abraham to understand what the called-out people of God are and are supposed to do. Genesis 12:1-3 *Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; ²and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; ³and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."*

You can see in this the difficulty of the call God laid on Abraham, to leave the security of country and family and father to go to a strange land. How Abraham could do it? The general answer is *faith*, but you must have something to put your faith in. And, for Abraham it was this astonishing promise of God. It is the promise of future grace described in verses 2 and 3 that enabled Abraham to obey the call of God in verse 1. Ben Patterson accurately states this about the ways and words of God. He says *the "you musts" we hear from God are overshadowed by his "I wills."* Got that? That's really true, but some people, maybe you, only seem to be able to hear the "you musts" of God. Oh, you are really aware of what God expects you to do but you haven't come to grips with his many precious promises. Do you know what kind of spiritual life that can

lead to? Very often a joyless legalism, if you are able to maintain a religious life at all. It tends to be all duty with no source of energy for obedience. That energy is supplied to us by an understanding and embracing of the *I wills*. Now, it must be said that some of us seem only able to hear the *I wills* of God while ignoring His commands. That can lead to careless carnality. Which of those do you want? Joyless legalism or careless carnality? How about instead a joyful, full-hearted devotion? That can only happen when we listen to all that God says - the *you musts* and the *I wills*. Verses 2 and 3 are full of wonderful promises from God. All totaled there are seven promises. See them? #1 is I will make you a great nation. #2 - I will bless you. #3 I'll make your name great. #4 You shall be a blessing. #5 I will bless those who bless you. #6 I will curse those who curse you. #7 In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. That's the seven, but for our purposes today, I want to sharpen our focus down to just two of these great promises to Abe.

The first of those promises is what I will call *greatness*. The word "great" is used twice in the promise. 2a *I will make you a great nation.* 2c *And make your name great.* Great nation. Great name. They are related. Abraham's name became great as his nation became great. Now to appreciate this promise you want to notice to whom God was talking here. This is Abram of Ur, who has how many children? Zero. Abram would really love just a family, one child would be nice, but this puzzling God is talking about a nation. Furthermore, he was being asked to leave his family and go to an entirely new place where he had no relatives, no reputation, no name and no influence. This *great nation* business seems highly unlikely, but it happened. Oh, it took a while. It took quite a while for this to see any fulfillment. It started with just Isaac, and then there was Jacob, but Jacob had twelve fruitful boys who, by the time they left Egypt 400 years later, had become quite a great people, so that when the great people finally connected to a great homeland you had a great nation. But the greatness of Israel that would come under the kings David and Solomon was just a preview of the fulfillment to come. The final expression of God's promise has come to pass in the church of Jesus. You see, when we study the promises of God to Abraham we aren't just reading some distant word to an ancient figure. These promises are being kept in our very own day and in our very own lives. North Park Church of Wexford is a city in Abraham's great nation. And every man or woman of faith today is a citizen of that nation.

Look at Galatians 3 to see what I'm talking about. Galatians 3:6-7 (NIV) So also Abraham *"believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."*

⁷*Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. Father Abraham had many sons; many sons had father Abraham; and I am one of them, and so are you. What is that supposed to mean? I'm not an ethnic Jew, and you likely aren't either. How can we be called children of Abraham? Paul argues that the true sons and daughters of Abraham are not the racial Jews but the heart Jews, those who like Papa A put their trust in the Lord. Galatians 3:7-9 Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham.*

⁸*The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "All the nations will be blessed in you."* ⁹*So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.*

That means you and me and all who love Jesus whether Jew or Gentile. We share in the promises made to Abraham. So again, Paul writes in Galatians 3:28-29 *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* ²⁹*And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.*

Who inherits the promises to Abraham? Believers in Jesus. Romans 9 also takes our attention away from biological succession to spiritual succession. Romans 9:6b (ESV) *Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel.* What's that mean? It means that not all of physical Israel is a part of spiritual Israel. Romans 9:7-8 (ESV) *And not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named."* ⁸*This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.* Once again Paul is arguing that the issue is not genetics, at least not the kind you can study with a microscope. I suppose if there were a DNA of the soul you could see in that our link to father Abraham. His believing heart is present in every true Christian.

What that means for us today is simply and powerfully this - these promises are not just his, they are ours. We are the great nation God promised. Look at what is said to the church in I Peter 2:9 *you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.* I was reading this week that of the 7.5 billion humans on our planet, more than two billion call themselves *Christian*. That is a great nation.

Wow! Did God ever come thru on this one! He has given to Abraham a great nation and a great name, and you and I are part of that living legacy.

Before we go on I want to make just a general observation about the comparisons between how Genesis 11 begins and how Genesis 12 begins. Genesis 11 contains the tower of Babel story. The tone of this chapter is very different from that of chapter 12. The beginning of 11 is an open door into the mind of the secular city. It shows men functioning without God, setting about to make a name for themselves, to create their own great nation. It is about their plans and their doings. By contrast Genesis 12 tells about God's plans and God's doings. The verbal contrasts are impressive. In Genesis 11:3 it states, "They said to each other." In Genesis 12 it says "The Lord said." In Genesis 11 we find the builders of Babel saying, "Let us make bricks, let us build a city for ourselves, so that we can make a name for ourselves." In Genesis 12 we find God telling Abraham, "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you, I will make your name great." Can you name any of the architects of Babel? Not a one. But everybody knows about Abraham. That is the difference between do-it - yourself greatness and the greatness which God bestows on His servants.

Now, let's move along to our second element of God's promise to Abraham and that is influence. This is found in both verse 2 and verse 3. In verse 2 *I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great. And so you shall be a blessing.* For the most part Abraham is described here as the blessee, but now it says to he is the blessing. In short, he is blessed to be a blessing. And the opportunity to be a blessing is part of the blessing isn't it? Do you see that? Zechariah 8:13 *It will come about that just as you were a curse among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so I will save you that you may become a blessing.* Follow what God is saying there. I will save you for what? To be a blessing. It is true for us as it was for Abraham that we are saved to serve. God didn't just choose Abe and the Jews for them to hoard all the goodness of God. They were to be an instrument of holiness, peace and joy to the whole world. The same is true for us. We are to be conduits of mercy not cul-de-sacs. Maximum growth occurs when we are taking in much and putting out much. When I was in Israel I got to see and float in the Dead Sea. It is a very warm body of water, extremely salty, totally calm and totally dead. No life in it at all. The reason it is dead is because its water goes nowhere. The Jordan River flows into the Dead Sea but the waters of the sea go nowhere. That, my friend, is a formula for death - to be a consumer without

being a giver. Too many in our churches are spiritual consumers, taking what Jesus and the church have to give without any outlets of service and ministry. Some of you may fall in that category. And I must inform you that's not good, it's not healthy and it misses the blessing.

I read this week of about the owner of a drive-thru coffee business in Portland who was surprised one morning to have a customer not only pay for her mocha but pay for the drink of the person in the car behind her. It put a smile on the owner's face to tell the next customer her drink had already been paid for. The second customer was so pleased that someone else had purchased her coffee that she bought coffee for the next customer. This string of kindnesses - one stranger to the next - lasted for over two hours. Now that's how it's supposed to work with God's love right? You want to sing, its fresh like spring you want to pass it on! And what a privilege it is to do so! We are to be a blessing, but like the coffee story, our blessing others flows out of having been blessed ourselves. We are blesser and blessee but which comes first? Being the blessee. God fills our cups, and then we, out of His fullness can pour into others. And the funny thing is that doing so is the only way to really maintain God's fullness in our lives. Love is that strange thing that you can only keep if you give it away.

Bob Sjogren in his book on world missions writes about God's covenant with Abraham and describes what he calls the top line of the Covenant and the bottom line. The top line is that list of what God pours into His chosen people. The bottom line is what they are expected to pour out into others, even into foreign nations. He writes, *If I'm focusing on the top line of the covenant only and saying, "God bless me, bless me, bless me." I've missed half of Christianity. The other half is turning around with that blessing and reaching out.* I think of the words of Jesus about how if you have been given much, much will be expected of you. That's true. With privilege goes responsibility. Same in the kingdom of God. We are saved, but not to sit around and wait for the rapture. We are saved to serve. Psalm 67 is interesting. Psalm 67:1 *God be gracious to us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us.* Great! That's a fine prayer. We need that. That is the top line of the covenant. But it doesn't stop there. 2 *That Your way may be known on the earth, Your salvation among all nations.* The blessing of God is, hopefully, to spill over and here especially it is talking about spilling over into the nations of the world. The covenant God made with Abraham started with one guy but had an international goal. 3 *Let the peoples*

praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You. Then look at the last verse of the psalm 7 *God blesses us, that all the ends of the earth may fear Him.* What is God's goal in blessing His people? Not just your own personal well-being but that we might declare him to all peoples. Look around you at the banners hanging in this sanctuary. Banners of the countries where we have missionaries. North Park is a church invested in world mission and that fits the paradigm laid out here. We are to be blessing the nations with the knowledge of salvation. And I am glad to be in a church that is doing that. The ancient Jewish nation didn't always do so well with this did they? When Jesus came they had lost this entirely and were ingrown, seeing the nations around them not as a mission field but only as a threat. So, a major part of the message Christ preached involved the purpose of God that was transcultural - salvation for Samaritans and Romans and Gentiles of all sorts. He told His followers to go and be witnesses to all the nations, but first they were supposed to do what? Huh? Wait for the blessing. The Holy Spirit, the promise of the Father will come, you will be the blessees and then you will go and be blessings to all the nations.

Look again at Genesis 12:3c *In you all the families of the earth will be blessed.* We read the same thing stated by God to Abraham in Genesis 22:18a *In your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.* This part of the promise is real easy to explain because the New Testament does it for us. Galatians 3:8 *The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "All the nations will be blessed in you."* Abraham never left the Middle East. How could he bless all nations? Thru his offspring, his seed, his descendant - Jesus, the savior of the world. Christ is how all nations are blessed in Abraham. But this Christ makes his blessings flow thru His people who are scattered everywhere and now go by the title, "Christian." Is that a title you wear? Is that a name you want to claim? Then hey, you are one very blessed person, who has the privilege and the calling to reach out to others in his name. Our concern, Christian, must be to claim the promise that is ours and with it the challenge of blessing others.

So, that brings us to PBJ. We introduced in September the overall approach, which starts with prayer. We hope you have become more consistent, more alert to pray for God to work in you, to pray for God to work in others. Now, we are ready to focus for a few weeks on being the blessing children of Abraham are called, are privileged to be. That starts in your family, it extends to your church, it includes your neighborhood and your work place. It

expresses itself in a great variety of ways. One of you will fix your neighbor's car, another will bake some cookies, another will offer a sympathetic ear, another will invite to Christmas eve worship, another will speak an encouraging word. The neat thing about our focus on blessings is that we have yet another acrostic to offer you. Do you know what that is? It is BAGELS. Now, we associate bagels with the Jewish culture, so this is highly fitting. Children of Abraham bless with BAGELS, but for our purpose this stands for Bless, Affirm, Gifting, Eat, Listen, Serve. Say that with me – BAGELS. Bless is the general term – affirm references speaking encouraging words, thanks and praises. Giving gifts – something I am not prone to do, but, as we practiced PBJ last year I found myself reaching out to others, strangers even, with simple gifts, as I know that, for many, gifts is their love-language. The E stands for EAT. You gotta eat, and when you invite someone to your home for a meal, or take a co-worker to lunch, those foody times become times to build relationships. The L is for listen – wow – what a gift that is. It presumes the gift of time, because you can't listen without giving time, but it means more than that. It means letting someone know they are valuable, that their thoughts and experiences count. Your ears can bless enormously. And then there is the S – which is serve. That is vague and general. You make it specific, rooted in your abilities, your availabilities, as we all have different ways to express compassion practically to those around us.

So, this is our challenge and calling as we head into the Christmas season. And what a great time of year for this focus. The Christmas season usually presents us with unusual opportunities to share the love – obviously with gifts, but also with words, with ears, and with hands that serve. But Christmas also clearly reminds us that we love others because He, our precious Savior first loved us. We are blessed. Our cups runneth over so that, out of our undeserved fullness, we pour out into the lives of others, for their good, for our joy and also for the glory of our Christ whose servants we are.

So, once again we pray. Today especially, let's pray that we would grasp more deeply than ever our high calling in covenant with our Lord and engage more deeply with the bottom line of the covenant- the responsibility, the privilege to be a blessing, for Jesus' sake, to men, women, boys and girls of every tribe and tongue and nation.