

Blessing

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 11 June 2023

Preacher: Pastor Jennifer Stamm

[0 : 0 0] Good morning. The scripture this morning comes from the book of Genesis, chapter 12, verses 1 through 9. The Lord had said to Abram, go from your country, your people, and your father's household to the land I will show you.

I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you. I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you, I will curse. And all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

So Abram went, 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.

And they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Morah at Shechem.

At that time, the Canaanites were in the land. The Lord appeared to Abram and said, To your offspring I will give this land. So he built an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to him.

[1 : 1 5] From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel, and pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the Lord, and called on the name of the Lord.

Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Good morning. Good morning. So I ask that you join me, and you take a moment to sit in this space together.

That we sit in quiet, that we listen for God, to feel the gratitude for the gift of this time that we're allowed to spend together each week. Where we're able to focus on something other than ourselves.

Something bigger than ourselves. And let us feel peace for just a moment. God, we ask that you grant us to hear your word this morning, and know your voice.

Amen. So today, we're talking about blessings. So what's a blessing? This is not a rhetorical question.

[2 : 3 4] So what's a blessing? Family. What else? Okay. Okay. Gifts. What else? Health. Health. Friends.

Friends. Church. Your church. So, a blessing, it says, if you look it up, is a state of mind.

To some, it's a formal word or ritual, like the benediction that we do at the end of the service, where you're invited to go in the love of God, in the grace of Jesus, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

The word blessing has its roots in the Lord, the word blessing has its roots in old English, and it means to be marked with blood. A blessing, then, is an experience that marks us.

It's something that changes or transforms us. It infuses us with God's holiness. In Latin, the word benedictory means to speak well of, to praise.

[3 : 38] And I like this translation because when we're kind, when we speak from a place of love, when we share goodness with others, we are a blessing to them.

Your kindness towards others is a blessing. In the Bible, one of the first instances of God speaking blessings to God's people is from our scripture reading that Carol did so well today.

Abraham is told to go leave his country, and God says, I will bless you. I will make your name great. God called Abraham into a covenant of faithful service.

By leaving the territory of his family and going and following God's call, he distinguished himself from those relatives who stayed in Mesopotamia and built the Tower of Babel.

Abraham, or Abraham as he's later called, illustrates his ability to trust God when he's told to make a big change and move to a new location.

[4 : 42] But why does he do that? Because God has a plan. He always has a plan. The blessings that God gives us are intended to be shared with all, beginning with that immeasurable blessing of salvation from sin and all of those other things that we named that God has given us.

I know I've been greatly blessed, and perhaps you have too. So many of us have been given so much material goods, adequate homes, families, friends, jobs, and that's just for starters.

So not too long ago, I needed to get a new phone. And I researched my phone, and I picked out which one I wanted, and it's not an Apple.

And I tracked that phone until I knew it was going to come to my house and I'd be able to have it in my hand. And I took really good care of it.

I would make sure the screen was clean. I paid extra attention to where I put it and everything that was going on with it. And after a few weeks, something happened.

[5 : 54] I became familiar with the phone. I found myself leaving it in the yard when I was working outside. Yesterday, I left it in the sprinkler. I found it dusty and dirty.

My amazement with my new phone, this piece of technology, had worn off. Sadly, sometimes that happens to us.

We lose that amazement of the blessings that are in our life. Like I lost that amazement of my new phone. We can also lose that amazement of Jesus and the gospel because we're distracted by so many other things.

This Bible is a big book. It's made up of so many little books, but they all point to one person, Jesus. And amidst these books, we find ideas and thoughts and beliefs that tend to or can sometimes distract us from one point.

Not only the Bible, but the world we live in is full of distractions. We have advertisements from companies that are constantly seeking our attention. Personally, our lives demand so many things.

[7 : 17] Our families, our jobs. We're used to having to be so busy that it's not a surprise that we can get distracted from the good news of Jesus or the gospel or lose our amazement in our blessings.

I lost that amazement from my phone because it's an object that can never fully satisfy my deepest needs. But when we lose that amazement in Jesus and the gospel and those blessings in our lives, we start looking towards other things and we become amazed by those things.

We can often lose sight of the gifts and the blessings. We can lose sight of how God makes a way for us, even when one doesn't seem so clear.

We've been given the greatest gifts of faith, hope, and love. And we've been blessed by the means of grace and the hope of glory. If you have Christ, you've been given everything that's eternally worthwhile.

So the big question is why? Why have we been so blessed? And the answer to that question is found in our reading from Genesis 12 today.

[8 : 36] In the opening verse, God tells Abraham, 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 and I will bless you.

Abraham went and God blessed. But this isn't the whole story for that. You need to read the rest of the sentence. It's funny how that happens sometimes. Here's how it continues.

I will bless you, God says to Abraham, and you will be a blessing and all people on earth will be blessed through you.

God's promise to bless Abraham is accompanied by a bigger explanation. He's blessing Abraham is just the first step in a much bigger plan to extend that blessing to all people.

I think in the first place, what this statement says to us regarding God's intentions is that God's promise points to his greater plan for the world.

[9 : 43] He certainly intended to bless Abraham and his descendants, but he never meant his blessing to be exclusive. He singled out Abraham as his first step in what God always determined would be a world-embracing plan of salvation.

God's selection of Abraham, his choosing him out of a mass of humanity who had drifted so far from him, was a tactical move. We hear it in Isaiah chapter 42, verses 1 through 7.

Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen, the one in whom I delight. I will put my spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out or raise his voice in the streets.

A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not stuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice. He will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth.

In his teaching, the people will put their hope. This is what God the Lord said, the creator of the heavens who stretches them out, who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it, who gives breath to its people and life to those who walk on it.

[11 : 06] I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness. I will hold your hand. I will keep you, and I will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind to free captives from prison, and to release from the dungeons those who sit in darkness.

The role that God assigned to the Old Testament people of Israel was a crucial one. They were the first recipients of God's gracious promises. To them belonged to the covenant, that wonderful agreement that God first established a relationship with a community of people.

God gave Israel the law, the revelation of his holy nature, of his character, and of his expectations. Israel was the instrument that God chose to give his Messiah, his servant, his son to the world, his chosen one, who would make the means of salvation for everyone.

As the New Testament makes clear, these promises of blessings that God made to Abraham ultimately point to Jesus Christ, and we find their fulfillment in him.

So this promise shows us God's heart. It reveals that God's love has always been for the whole world. And his plan was always to offer salvation to everyone.

[12 : 39] I think that sometimes we forget, or that we think of missions as sort of an add-on to the church. It's an add-on to what we're supposed to be doing.

As though the Great Commission to go into all the world and make disciples from every nation was an afterthought. Sometimes we treat it as if Jesus paused just before going to heaven and exclaimed, Oh, I almost forgot.

I want you all to go into the world now and preach the gospel to all nations, instead of spending his entire life teaching us that. I think as Christians, sometimes we don't think that doing this is all that important.

But Genesis 12 shows us that from the very beginning, God's purpose is to bless, and that has always had a universal scope. So God doesn't just have a plan for us.

He has a plan to work through us. We see this linked in his statement to Abram, I will cause you to become the father of a great nation.

[13 : 50] God's purpose went to something much larger than Abraham's immediate circumstances. God's plan for each of us as a congregation, as individuals, go beyond our own circumstances and surroundings.

In Acts, when Jesus told the 12 to be witnesses, his map was the entire world. So where do we fit into this massive plan?

We go where God places and he directs us. And we have to trust God that he'll always be at work. We are to be a blessing to all God's people.

If you want to know what God's really been up to, it's that it. It's from the start. God was not prejudiced. Even with Abraham, the Lord wasn't forming an exclusive club.

He didn't say, I'm going to take you, and I'm going to take you, and I'm going to take you, and forget the rest of you. God blessed everyone so that we, in turn, can go out and bless the world.

[15 : 03] God's not a tribal deity. He's not the God of one particular race or nation to the exclusion of all others. He's never intended to bestow his love upon just one chosen group while shutting out all others.

It's our natural tendency as human beings to think of our own groups as best and the most important people on earth. The traditional Chinese name for their land is the Middle Kingdom because they saw China as the center of the world with all other countries being on the edges.

The prime meridian, zero degrees longitude, runs through Greenwich, England, just outside London because the British measured everything from there.

It was the center of their world. That same ethnocentric perspective is evident in human language as well. The ancient Greece called all non-Greeks barbarians because to their ears, foreign tongues sounded like bar, bar.

It sounded like the braying of animals, not the speech of real human beings. Many tribal languages use the word that simply means person or human in their language for the name of their group, thus implying that all others are something less than that.

[16 : 27] We humans are incurably tribal. We tend to believe that our tribe, however we think of it, our country, our race, our ethnic group, our religion, our clan, our family, our church, is superior to all others.

Ethnocentrism is among the most deep-seated of all prejudices, and I think it's one of the ones that God is most determined to overcome.

God intends to bless all people, and he started with Abraham, but he made it clear in doing so that Abraham and the people of Israel after him were to become the instruments through who God would eventually bring a way of salvation that would be for everyone.

In addition to what this shows us about the heart and the plan and the purpose of God, think about what this principle teaches us about our own role in the world.

The noted missionary writer Don Richardson has referred to the twin promises in Genesis 12 as the top line, I will bless you, and the bottom line, you will be a blessing.

[17 : 43] They remind us that everything we've received from God is ultimately to be used for the benefit of other people, especially those who don't yet know him.

All of this has been summarized in the phrase, blessed to be a blessing. This idea is actually one of the most crucial principles in the whole Bible.

The concept of blessed to be a blessing teaches us something very basic about God's expectations for each of us, not just Abraham. It's a fundamental statement of purpose that applies to everyone through faith and becomes part of the people of God.

All those blessings that we named, God gives us, and he intends that we share them with all, beginning with the blessing of salvation and sin and all of those other good things that God has given us.

So let's make this personal for a minute. Take stock of your own life. Think about everything that God has given you and all of the blessings that he's poured out, whether they're material or they're spiritual.

[18 : 58] Most of us have far more than we'd like to acknowledge compared to the world's truly poor. I'm wealthy beyond belief, and you probably are too.

Do we imagine that we've been given so much simply to enable us to live comfortable, even luxurious lives, while so many throughout the world are suffering want?

Our focus for a moment, more on the greatest blessing of all. Do you know God personally? Have you received his gift of salvation through Jesus Christ?

What is your relationship with God like? What other gift or blessing can compare with that? Are peace with God and the hope of heaven just yours to enjoy all by yourself?

Do you take it and sit in the dark in the closet? No. We are supposed to share it with everyone, everywhere.

[20 : 04] Think about how you can be a blessing to others, how you can encourage, help, listen, teach, or maybe the hardest, forgive.

Maybe the best lesson we can take from looking at the life of Abraham is to take each day at a time, enjoy God's blessings, love one another, and be blessed to be a blessing.

I'd like to end with Proverbs 11, verse 25. Those who live to bless others will have blessings heaped upon them, and the one who pours out his life to pour out blessings will be saturated with favor.

Do not repay evil for evil. We are all called to be a blessing. Let us pray. God, we ask that you give us the faith to place our future in your hands, that you comfort and encourage us when we become worried and concerned about what the future might hold, that you help us to be blessed to be a blessing for each and every person that we encounter.

In your name we pray. Amen. He deserves an amen. Amen. And thank you for your blessings that you share with us each and every week.

[21 : 32] So we have a few announcements before we end service.

In your bulletin, we have a new sermon series coming up called My Story, My Song, and we invite you to share a song that means a lot with you. So the information is in here, and we need those, I believe, this week so that we can get working on that sermon series.

Also, we are looking for people to join our welcome ministry, so that is also in your bulletin, a little description. In here, the tough stuff, Thursday, June 22nd, is actually at 6.30, not 7 o'clock.

And then we have the next step in issues in the United Methodist Church in finding our way, and those are going to be June 13th, the 17th, and the 20th.

So I hope that you join us in one of those, some of those, that you use these to help you find a way where you can be blessed to be a blessing.

[22 : 41] So in the name of God our Father, in the name of Jesus Christ his Son, and with the love of the Holy Spirit, may you find peace and joy and happiness and go out and serve the world today.

Amen.