

Blessed to Bless

Genesis 12:1-3

The human heart is a perfect organ in our circulatory system. It pumps blood from the right side of the heart to the lungs where it gives up its carbon dioxide and receives fresh oxygen. The oxygenated blood comes back into the heart, and from the contraction of the left side chamber, blood is sent throughout the body. Because the right side only has to send blood to the nearby lungs, it is a smaller muscle than the left side that is needed to push blood from to every cell of your body. (You can remember it is the right side that sends blood to the lungs because the blood comes *right* back, but blood from the left side has *left* to do its job).

This circulatory system is amazing. But did you notice one thing, though, about the circulatory system? Blood is constantly flowing—either to get or deliver oxygen—throughout the body. It is aptly called the “circulatory system.” The heart is not—nor does it have—a storage facility. The heart gets blood...then it gives blood. It receives...then gives! It receives...then gives! It receives...then gives!

The heart illustrates what our Scripture truth is for emphasis in today’s sermon: We are blessed to bless. We get from God in order to give for God. Blessed, to bless.

We take for our text today Genesis 12:1-3, the call of Abraham. We look today at a strange text for an Advent Sermon. It is certainly the only time I’ve ever preached a Christmas sermon with the text found in the book of Genesis. But the text illustrates the point of this sermon and gives the answer to the question “Why has God blessed us so much? We are blessed **by** God in order to bless **for** God. **We are blessed to bless.**

Before reading that text, let’s set the context of this call in the course of history. The first eleven chapters have laid out humanity’s rebellion against God and the dire consequences of trying to go through life without God. Although God extends his mercy and his offer of compassion to humanity, mankind wants to go its own way. When God judges, whether through the confusion of languages at Babel or even a world-wide flood, wiping out all human life except for Noah and his wife, and his three sons (Shem, Ham, and Japheth) and their wives, men and women soon revert to their old ways of sinfulness-gone-to-seed perversion. As we come to the end of Genesis 11, we see there is no foreseeable future, only hopelessness. Human power, apart from God, cannot create a future. Even Sarai is barren (11:30).

Then comes Chapter twelve verse one; the Lord speaks his powerful word directly into this situation of barrenness. It is a promise about the future, spoken to this man without any hope of a future. It is also a call to abandonment of the familiar, a renunciation of what was considered valuable, a call for a dangerous departure from the world of what would be considered by humans as “security.” Yet, it was a call to and a promise of a great future, something Abram did not have, and could not achieve, on his own.

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. And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great. And so you shall be a

blessing. And 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 shall be blessed. So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him. ”

There are three primary blessing promised to Abram here: 1) he would receive a land; 2) he would father a nation; and 3) he would be a source of blessing for all peoples.

In verse one is the promise of a land: “Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father’s house, to the land which I will show you.” We are not told that Abram dreamed of a better land than the one he knew. This is not Abram’s dream, but God’s. He will obey a command without knowing in advance when and where he will have reached God’s intended destination. God will deal with Abram on a “need to know,” basis. He will let him know more details when the time is appropriate. For now, he is to leave the familiar and set out on an as yet unknown path to an as yet unknown destination and destiny. It is so very hard for many of us to realize that God still does that to us today. That is, God will ask us to do something and we have no way of knowing what the outcome will be.

In verse two, there is the second promise that Abram would father a nation: “And I will make you a great nation.” No details are given, just promises. Abram cannot have children by barren Sarah so Abram might have assumed at this point God would raise up his descendents through another wife. At first, the great nation, meaning “innumerable descendants” promise would be no great problem to believe in. But when he finds out that barren, aged Sarah is supposed to be the mother of one who will carry forward God’s plan does the matter call for “great faith.” And when that time came, Abraham believed God as Romans 4 emphasizes.

Next, God declares he will bless Abraham: “I will bless you...and so you shall be a blessing. The Hebrew *barak*, “to bless,” means to empower, to enable to succeed, to prosper, to be fertile, to live long. God took the initiative. God wants to bless. It is in his nature to do so. He does not have to be cajoled. He wishes to give it to all who trust in him. But why does God want to bless Abraham? *“I will bless you, and make your name great. And so you shall be a blessing.”*

He is blessed in order to bless.

The ultimate and most stupendous way in which this blessing of Abraham blesses others is found in the last part of God’s promise to him: *“And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”*

This is the Advent Announcement echoing from the first book of the Bible. It is through the coming of Messiah, Jesus Christ, that this promise is fulfilled. All the communities of the earth will find blessing in Abraham, because from his lineage will come forth the one named Jesus, “for he shall save his people from their sins” and Emmanuel, “God with us.” And in that blessing God intends the blessing to spread, not just within the confines of Abraham’s nation, but emanating out to “all the families of the earth.”

When Christ came in the fullness of time—just at the right moment in history—according to the Galatians 4:4, he was born of a woman—a virgin—to redeem us. He became the one mediator

between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. He is the Savior, not just of the descendants of Abraham, the Jews, but of all races. He is the “Savior of all men” (1 Tim 4:10). Our church is composed of people representing so many of the families of the earth. Please stand if you represent the families of the earth from Jewish lineage. As I suspected, it is confirmed that no one here claims a Jewish heritage. I wish we had many, many Jewish people. The Hebrews are, after all, still God’s chosen people. They are, indeed, the ones to whom the Gospel should first go, “to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.” But it is also true that through the Messiah, birthed through the lineage of Abraham, “all the families of the earth are blessed.” Salvation has come to us, though we come from so many different families of the earth. If you represent families of the earth from Asian lineage please stand. (Remain standing). If you represent families of the earth from African lineage. If you represent families of the earth from Middle Eastern. If you represent families from the Americas—Native American or Latino lineage. If you represent European lineage or any other.

What a joy it is to visually see how these many families of the earth converge together at 90th and Glisan in little ol’ Portland, Oregon to worship the same God.

You stand here as visual testimony of the fulfillment of this promise to Abraham, that “in him all the families of the earth shall be blessed,” for it was through Abraham that Jesus came for us all. And someday Baby Jesus who grew up to be the God-Man-Savior, will have his praises reverberate in heaven from “every tongue, and race, and people and nation.”

Abraham was so blessed, and so are we **as a church**. And we are blessed to bless. The church first receives from God...and then it gives. We are blessed to bless. We have been blessed with a paid-for, usable building. We should continue the practice of blessing our community and other ministries around the city—such as Sunnyside Counseling Services or CEF or Multnomah Bible College or the Ben Sok Korean Presbyterian Church or SkateChurch—with free or low-cost use of the blessing of this facility.

We are blessed with a location with easy access from the two major interstate highways that serve our city. We have some 10,000 vehicles pass by our building every day. We are visible. That is a blessing. How will we use that blessing? We are blessed to bless.

We have been blessed with unique and gifted people—members, regular attenders, elder team members and pastors that are seeking to follow the Lord into the future. Our church is blessed, but not just for our own enjoyment and smugness. We are blessed to bless.

And this is also true of **each of us individually**. The giving always starts with God...”We love, because He first loved us.”(1 John 4:19). We are blessed to bless.

I am a blessed person. This week I sat inside my warm house with my family gathered around, listening to the howling wind, beating cold, wind-driven rain against my windows. I was warm. My body was fed. I was safe.

Did you feel that way this week? We are blessed people. But even beyond these material, physical comforts—which may or may not have been your experience this week—we are a blessed people, rich in spiritual and emotional benefits from the hand of God.

If we know Christ as our Savior and are endeavoring to follow him as Lord, we have Christ's **righteousness**—the liberating freedom from the penalty of sin. We have **peace** as we experience victory over debilitating, addictive power of sin. We know a settled **joy**, knowing the answers to those three basic questions of life: Who am I? (A son of God); Why am I here? (To glorify God by my life.) and Where am I going? (Wherever He leads me until I arrive in heaven through the portal of death.) We have the blessings of the Kingdom of God which Romans 14:17 says “is not eating and drinking”—mere physical, material comforts—but is found in *“righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”*

How have you been blessed by God? Did you know it is not just for your benefit to be enjoyed as if you were a reservoir. The blessings of God are given to you so you can be like a spring-fed lake with blessings pouring in and a stream flowing out to refresh those downstream.

How has God blessed you? With knowing the Gospel? Have you been able to pass it along to others?

Has he given you a spare bedroom that just now houses spare boxes? Could it be God would bless someone else who needs a place to stay?

Has God blessed you with a stable marriage? Could it be you could be a blessing to welcome children into your home—whether through conception, adoption, or foster parenting?

Has God blessed you with victory over sinful addictive behaviors? Could it be your message of hope could be used by God to free another struggler to claim victory in Christ?

If you have been blessed with righteousness, peace, and joy of the Holy Spirit, then you are commissioned to convey blessings on to others this week. I don't know exactly how God has blessed you, or how he asks you to become a blessing to others. But let's share together in this journey. Please raise your hand for a mic and tell us how God has blessed you...and how he might be asking you to be a blessing.