

GENESIS 12:1-9
GOD'S BLESSINGS TO THE NATIONS

God said to Abram, "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (v's 2-3). Why did God choose to bless Abram? What was so special about him? Nothing! God just chose him. To emphasize that fact in God just choosing people, listen to this passage from Deuteronomy, well after the life of Abram.

Before entering the Promised Land Moses said to the people, "It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set His love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that He swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt" – Deuteronomy 7:(7-8).

"Do not say in your heart, after the Lord your God has thrust them out before you, 'It is because of my righteousness that the Lord has brought me in to possess this land,' whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is driving them out before you. ... The Lord your God is driving them out from before you, that He may confirm the word that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Know, therefore, that the Lord your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people" – Deuteronomy 9:(4-6).

God just chose Abram and made a promise to him, even though he and his descendants were no better than the people around them. God kept His promise. The question really should be, 'For what purpose did God choose Abram?' God's answer: "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed". Through belief in the promises that God made to Abram all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

It's not that we're saved in one way, through belief in Jesus, and Abram was saved in another way. As we saw last week, right from the start of the Bible God told people that He would send salvation from the sin that Satan introduced into God's perfect creation through a descendant of Eve. Now He narrows down that family line to be coming through Abram.

This isn't just some general promise that salvation would come through one of Abram's kids – this is a miraculous promise. At this point Abram is seventy-five years old and has no kids. That's what's so special about Abram, the fact that he can't claim to have any hand in this plan of salvation. Just think about how many of you in your seventies are planning on having kids.

As we saw, hundreds of years later Moses had to remind the people that they weren't special, they were sinful people through whom God chose to fulfill His purpose. Throughout their history they kept thinking that they were God's special chosen people to the exclusion of all other people, and they kept needing to be reminded. We still need to be reminded that there's nothing special about us, but rather God chose us to be His children.

This plan of salvation from the wages of sin announced at the beginning of Genesis is meant for all the families of the earth. Many people exclude themselves from these blessings, but we have no right to exclude anyone from God's grace, but rather we are to offer it to everyone.

Some think that this blessing transfers from the Jews to the Gentiles in the New Testament, but it had already been offered to all in the Old Testament, and in the New Testament, which we're more familiar with, we're reminded about that. Salvation is offered to all right from the beginning.

In Isaiah 42:(1-3), speaking of Jesus it says, "Behold My servant, whom I uphold, My chosen, in whom My soul delights; I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice **to the nations.**" That's the same promise as was given to Abram. God will bless all the nations of the earth through His chosen descendant from His chosen servant Abram. Jesus later quotes this verse in Matthew 12:(18-21) and goes onto say that in His name the Gentiles will hope.

Yes, we know that Jesus was sent explicitly to the nation of Israel, the lost sheep of Israel. Jesus clearly says that, but at the same time He offers salvation to the Gentiles as well.

"A Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon." But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples came and begged Him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before Him, saying, "Lord, help me." And He answered, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly" – Matthew 15:(22-28).

How would she know that she could come to Jesus and expect help from Him? She would know by the things that Jesus had been teaching. Much earlier Jesus had said, "I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And

there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.” – Luke 4:(25-27). Jesus points out two times in the Old Testament when God didn't help the Jews, but rather He helped non-Jews, pointing out that salvation is for more people than just the Jews.

What God begins in Abram He continues in Jesus' life and ministry, and then after His death and resurrection He explicitly sends His disciples to all the nations. “Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of **all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” – Matthew 28:(18-19). “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and **to the end of the earth**” – Acts 1:8.

Abram was a blessing not just to his family and people, but to all nations. Still today we have a hard time believing this, or living this. Sometimes we just serve ourselves, our church, and God has to turn us to see the others in our community. God's grace ought to take you beyond what God has done for you to others. Don't hoard God's blessings here in the church, but rather celebrate them out in the community. Practice God's grace towards others. God's grace is persistent in getting out to everyone.

After the great flood the people were told to spread out over the earth, but they chose not to. Instead, they chose to build a tower with its top in the heavens, making a name for themselves, lest they be dispersed over the face of the earth. They fought against God's will and so God dispersed them over the face of the earth. Our text is the next chapter, and here God says that He will bless those very same rebellious people through Abram.

God is repeatedly kind, gracious and good to us even when we're disrespectful towards Him. Ask yourself how God in His grace is turning you back to Him. How in His grace is He turning you to share the Gospel message of Jesus' death and resurrection salvation with others? How is He turning our congregation to care about our community? Yes, God can work through you even when you think He can't, be you seventy-five years old, older or younger. In little and big ways God can work through all of us who are the Gentiles whom this Gospel message has reached.

Quoting Isaiah 49:(6) Paul said, “The Lord has commanded us, saying, "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the **ends of the earth**." And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed” – Acts 13:(47-48)

May many more be appointed to eternal life from our church, from our community, and from all the families of the earth. Amen.