

Blessings from the Bridegroom

Introduction

The Text

¹ Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. ² And 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. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

⁴ So Abram went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. ⁵ And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother’s son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan, ⁶ Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷ Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. ⁸ From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord. ⁹ And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb.

¹⁰ Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. ¹¹ When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, “I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance, ¹² and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife.’ Then they will kill me, but they will let you live. ¹³ Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake.” ¹⁴ When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. ¹⁵ And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh’s house. ¹⁶ And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels.

¹⁷ But the Lord afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram’s wife. ¹⁸ So Pharaoh called Abram and said, “What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? ¹⁹ Why did you say, ‘She is my sister,’ so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife; take her, and go.” ²⁰ And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him, and they sent him away with his wife and all that he had. (Gen 12:1-20)

Why Genesis 12?

- A. I recognize that this is now the second Sunday in a row I’ve stepped out of our trek through Luke’s gospel to bring us a message from a text in the OT.
1. Last time, if you recall, the sermon was entitled Going in Circles and I preached from [Gen 8-9](#) and the story of Noah and the covenant God makes with him and with the rest of the world, really, through him.
 2. This morning it’s [Gen 12](#). Genesis is one of the books I’ve actually been reading through in my personal devotions morning by morning, and a few days ago I came to this chapter. There are occasionally times when reading the Scriptures that a sermon almost unfolds before my eyes—the verses naturally divide, the points plainly emerge, the big idea is clear,

the gospel gets a little brighter, my heart gets a little more inflamed for Jesus, His mission, and His church.

- a. And, when such a thing happens, I assume God may want me to share it. I hope it is okay with you that I take yet another week out of Luke for this.
- B. Let me just simply give you the headings I will be organizing my thoughts under this morning: (1) The Blessing Promised (vv. 1-9); (2) The Blessing Distorted (vv. 10-16); and (3) The Blessing Realized (vv. 17-20).

(1) The Blessing Promised (vv. 1-9)

A Blessed Nation Blessing Nations

- A. I think it's probably safe to say that, when many consider Christianity and the God of the Bible, they kind of think of it like this: When God shows up at the party, the party stops. God exists to put an end to our fun, to kill our joy, to make things awkward, uncomfortable, and even downcast and gloomy. He's always wanting to talk about sin and judgment. And we just want to have a good time. Why won't He ever let up?!
- B. But the flow of history as recorded in Genesis moves in the complete opposite direction. God creates to bless. That's why the creation account in [Gen 1](#) ascends to this climax: “²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’²⁹ And God said, ‘Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food’” (vv. 27–29).
 1. God basically sets the stage for one epic, ever-expanding party—the kind you don't feel sick after attending, the kind you don't need four Advil and a day to recover from. He blesses the man and woman, gives them everything they need, and then sets them out to multiply this out on the earth, to spread the blessing around.
 - a. It's actually when man kicks God out of the party, that everything spirals out—conflict, sickness, robbery, adultery, sexual assault, murder, war, and more. That's the story of a world without God, of men and women on their own terms.
- C. But all along the way, God has shown Himself reluctant to leave us to ourselves and resilient in His pursuit of us. So now, here again in [Gen 12](#), God intrudes into this fallen and corrupted world, and “What is His intention?” you ask.
 1. Well, it should come as no surprise to us now . . . His intention is to bless: “¹ Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.² And 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.³ I will bless those who bless you, and him

who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (vv. 1-3).

- a. What we see in these verses is that God’s blessing is promised not only to Abraham and his family (Israel) here, but through him and them to the nations. We could, perhaps, sum up the promise like this: “I will make of you a blessed nation for the purpose of blessing nations.”
 - i. Here, Abram, and later, Israel, and now, the church in Christ, are called out of this world to be not only the recipients of God’s blessing, but mediators of that blessing to the world.
- D. Running underneath all of this is the question: Why do you exist? And closely related to it, a second question: Why do others exist?
1. If, on the one hand, you exist for God—to know Him, love Him, follow Him, and be blessed in Him—well then others are here for you to bless and serve. But if, on the other hand, you exist as god in your own mind, well then it follows that you will act as if others are here to bless and serve you.
 - a. These are going to be the questions that we continually come back to as we carry on in this. What is your fundamental orientation towards other people? Are you here from God for them? Or are they here for you?

A Royal Priesthood

- A. I suppose there is one last thing I should say about this idea of blessing. When we trace it out in the rest of Scripture, we come to find that it really is a priestly idea.
1. We see just a few chapters later that Abraham comes into contact with Melchizedek, an interesting and mysterious OT figure, who is himself both a king and a “[priest of God Most High](#)” ([Gen 14:18](#)). And we are told in [Gen 14:19](#) that, as a priest, he pronounces blessing upon Abraham. It’s what priests do, they receive and mediate the blessing of God to others.
 2. Later, in [Lev 9](#), as Aaron and his sons are just getting started in the priesthood within Israel, we read that God has them first offer up sacrifices and things for the sins of the people but it’s all kind of rising to this crescendo where at the end of the chapter we read this: “^{22a} [Then Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them . . .](#)” ([Lev 9:22a](#)).
 3. Later, in [Num 6:22-27](#), God explicitly commands the priests in Israel to bless His people. And He gives them words of a benediction which time won’t allow us to read now.
- B. Now why do I go into this? Well, again, it’s because this is what God has created and now redeemed us to be.
1. This is the sort of thing that stands in the background of [Exo 19:5-6](#), where God says that Israel is to be “[a kingdom of priests and a holy nation](#)” (v. 6). Peter later grabs ahold of this

text (in 1 Pet 2:9) and says: “That’s the church, that’s humanity as renewed in Christ. A royal priesthood. Receiving His blessing and, not hoarding it, but mediating it to others.”

(2) The Blessing Distorted (vv. 10-16)

Almost/Not-Quite

- A. If you’re at all familiar with NT studies, perhaps you have heard of what scholars typically refer to as the already/not-yet. The idea is that, with first advent of Jesus (what we will soon be celebrating at Christmas no doubt), many things regarding the accomplishment of our salvation have already been set in motion, secured, established. And yet, not every tension has been resolved.
1. Though Christ has already died and risen triumphant over Satan, sin, and death, and ascended to sit at the right of the Father, He has not yet put every last enemy under His foot.
 2. Though the battle for our salvation has already been decisively won for us at Calvary, and we are forgiven of our sins through and through and no longer in bondage to its power, we are not yet fully free from the daily struggle with our flesh.
 3. Though we have already been given the guarantee and down-payment of our inheritance in the Holy Spirit, we have not yet taken full acquisition of it as we shall in the new heavens and new earth.
- B. This is why the NT talks about our salvation in such peculiar terms. We are at some points said to be saved (past tense). And yet there are other places where it said that we are still being saved (present). And still there are other place where we read that we shall be saved (future).
1. There is, in other words, an already/not-yet quality to our salvation and understanding of it. Jesus’ first advent establishes the already. His second advent shall finally and fully bring in the not-yet.
- C. Now, that is the NT. We are in the OT. And somewhere along the way during my time in seminary as we were dealing with the sorts of stories like the one we are looking at this morning, I remember jotting down something like this: “If the structure of the NT is best made sense of within the framework of the already/not-yet, well then the structure of the OT is best made sense of within the framework of the almost/not-quite.”
1. We saw this last time with Noah. One would think with Noah God is starting again, a new humanity is being formed in him and things will be right this time. When all the world had receded into the muck of depravity, Noah found favor in God’s sight. But when the waters of the flood recede and Noah steps out of the boat into this pristine world, only just a verses later we are told that he plants a vineyard, gets hammered, and passes out naked in his tent.
 - a. And, as we read, we’re left thinking: “Almost . . . but not-quite.” Noah too, for all of his faith and virtue, needs redemption, needs a Redeemer.

From Courageous Faith to Craven Fear

- A. Well this is now the same sort of thing we see here with Abram is it not? Abram looks to be headed for a great win! He starts off strong from the line, like a man sprinting to the front of his heat in a marathon, forgetting that he has to keep up pace for some 26 more miles.
- B. In [vv. 1-9](#) we see the courageous faith of Abram. He leaves all that an ancient life would've been identified by and built upon—land, family, inheritance. And, as the author of Hebrews puts it, “[he went out, not knowing where he was going](#)” ([Heb 11:8](#)).
1. He did not know where he was going, nor what he would do when he got there. He only knew God had spoken, and that was enough. What courageous faith! Here is the “almost” of our framework.
- C. Could he be the one to restore, redeem humanity, to bring in something new? Almost . . . but not quite. The courageous faith of [vv. 1-9](#) give way in [vv. 10-16](#) now to what one commentator calls a “[craven](#)” (or cowardly) fear.
1. Let's look at these verses now: “¹⁰ [Now there was a famine in the land \[Canaan\]. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land.](#) ¹¹ [When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, ‘I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance,](#) ¹² [and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife.’ Then they will kill me, but they will let you live.](#) ¹³ [Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake.’](#) ¹⁴ [When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful.](#) ¹⁵ [And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house.](#) ¹⁶ [And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels”](#) ([vv. 10-16](#)).
- D. Last week, as I was reading through this text for my devotions, when I came to [v. 13](#) I nearly choked on my coffee. Read it just once more: “[Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake.](#)”
1. Do you see why I would refer to this as “The Blessing Distorted”? Abram is to be the one through whom blessing comes to all the families of the earth, and he can't even mediate blessing to his own family, to his own bride. In a pinch, to save his own skin, he says in essence: “Let it go well with me though it go poorly with you. Let my life be spared at your expense. It is my pleasure for your pain.”
 - a. I mean, did you catch that in [v. 16](#): “[And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels.](#)” He is getting rich while she is getting ravaged! It's an outrage!
- E. He aborts his priestly call. He abandons the mission of God. He seeks blessing for no one but himself. And the crazy thing is that Abram will do this again in [Gen 20](#), and then his son Isaac will do it with his bride Rebekah in [Gen 26](#). Almost . . . but not quite.

Exposing Me . . . Too

- A. At first, I was so uphauled, so disgusted, with Abraham here—“How could a man treat his bride like this?!” But then, suddenly, as the Spirit of God often does, He started using this text began to expose unsavory things in me. We like to pride ourselves in thinking that it is we who read our Bibles, but more often than not it is our Bibles that, by way of the Spirit, read us!
- B. I found myself facing that question I’ve already put forward: Am I here for others, or are others here for me? Am I bringing blessing and making sacrifice for others, or am I demanding blessing and requiring others sacrifice for me? Is it my riches for your poverty, or your riches at the cost of my own? Is it my pleasure for your pain, or your pleasure whatever pain it may bring upon me?
- C. Certainly the implications abound for us here. We could consider how this applies to the way we treat others at work, or the way we treat our kids, our neighbors, and so forth. But the clearest implication concerns the way husbands deal with their wives.
1. Gentlemen, do you act as if your wife exists for you? “When I get home, the house better be cleaned, dinner better be on the table, and it better not be any of that pre-made, easy stuff that you just heat up in the oven, I want something good tonight. And then I’m going to slouch back in my chair and watch SportsCenter while you finish up with the kids. Because God knows my day’s been so much harder than yours.”
- D. O may it never be! If we want to be real men as God designed us to be, let’s lay down your life in love for our ladies. No one’s doing that. It’s so easy to be selfish. Every little boy can do that. You want to show your strength, your manhood, bleed for your bride! Bless her at your own expense.
1. I sent out a sermon to members a couple weeks ago by Matt Chandler concerning the qualifications of Elders in [1 Tim 3](#). He talks about this same sort of thing when he gets to the qualification that an Elder must manage his own household well. He said something like: “Here’s what your life looks like if you have a wife and kids. When you get home from work, I don’t care how tired you are, your work isn’t done. That was just the first shift. Now it’s on to second shift. So you’re on the floor and you’re playing with the kids, your helping get dinner ready, you’re brushing teeth and reading bedtime stories. And then when the kids are finally asleep, you’re thinking, ‘Yes, me-time!’ But it isn’t me-time. It’s mama time. It’s your third shift. So you’re on the couch now asking your lady to tell you about her day, letting her pour out her stuff, sharing in her burdens and joys. And then it’s bed-time. You say, ‘Bed-time, but what about me-time?’ 5am. That’s me-time, that’s your time men. You don’t like it don’t get married.”
- E. Now, it seems to me, this text is particularly relevant to our cultural moment, is it not? I have in mind, of course, the #metoo movement and the cause that has swept our country with concern for women who are being exploited, treated as objects, disrespected, sexually assaulted, and left voiceless by men. “You exist for our pleasure, whatever pain that may cause you.”
1. One of the latest waves of the #metoo movement rose and crashed just a week or so ago here in the bay area with Google. A couple weeks ago, an article was published in the New York Times unveiling the way Google has handled in the past top execs who have been

accused of sexual misconduct—private arbitration, keeping things hush-hush, one guy they even dished out 90 million dollars as an exit package.

- a. When this hit the press, it seems women employees and others in the company felt emboldened to come out with more accusations, more concerns, and they called for change. On November 1, on Google campuses all around the world, tens of thousands of employees staged a walk out in protest. “We are not just here for you to harass and exploit. We are not territory to claim, toys to play with, prizes to win, and so forth. We have equal dignity and we demand equal treatment.”
- F. Our culture knows that this exploitive impulse, this abusive impulse, this self-oriented impulse is wrong. But, quite frankly, it has no idea how to truly make it right. A change in legislation, a change in policy, a change in system or structure, may help curb the evil, but it cannot change it at its source.
1. Paul in [Rom 13](#) says that the government with its laws and its sword can restrain evil but that is all it can do. They can penalize you for doing wrong, incentivize you towards the good, but they can’t change you at the heart level. They can’t make you genuinely love another human being.
 - a. At the end of the day, it’s still love for self that’s driving you. I don’t want the penalty, so I guess I won’t do that. I want the incentive, so I guess I’ll make that donation or whatever. But it’s still all about me.
 - i. The only One who can deal with that . . . is Jesus. And that’s really where our text begins to lead us now.

(3) The Blessing Realized (vv. 17-20)

The Rescue of God

- A. Abram faltered on this point. Self-interest prevailed. People, even His own bride were sacrificed to his own pleasure. It becomes clear that Abraham, like Noah before him, is not going to accomplish redemption, He Himself needs it as well. He needs help. He needs rescue. And so does his wife. And so that’s what God does: “¹⁷ But the Lord afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram’s wife. ¹⁸ So Pharaoh called Abram and said, ‘What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? ¹⁹ Why did you say, ‘She is my sister,’ so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife; take her, and go.’ ²⁰ And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him, and they sent him away with his wife and all that he had” (vv. 17-20).
1. What this text is telling us, indeed, what the entirety of the OT is telling us, is that God, not man, is our hope for true blessing, rescue, and transformation. He is the One who will see to it that we become a blessed nation blessing nations. And, of course, He will do it, by Himself becoming a man in the person of Jesus Christ.
- B. Abram is a picture of Jesus—he points us to Him, he prepares us for Him, but he is not Him. Almost, but not quite. You see, Jesus is going to be similar in many respects and yet different in every way.

1. Like Abram, Jesus leaves His Father, His land, all He's ever known to step out in obedience to God. And He's born a man. But unlike Abram, He will not falter in fear when faced with persecution and death.
2. Like Abram, Jesus has a bride, the church, you and I. But unlike Abram, He will not ask His bride to sacrifice herself for Him. No, He will lay down His life for her.
 - a. Abram's wife Sarai, we're told, was "beautiful" (v. 11). That's the whole reason he's worried. But, in spite of her great beauty, he is still unwilling to sacrifice himself or protect her. Jesus' wife, on the other hand, is filthy, covered in the muck of her sin. And yet He gives Himself to wash her: " ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph 5:25–27).
 - b. Abram got rich at his wife's expense. Jesus exchanges in the opposite direction: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor 8:9).
3. Like Abram Jesus is called to receive and mediate the blessing of God to His people and through them to the nations. But unlike Abram, His blessing will not be distorted with the self-concern. No! He will realize all that God had begun and left incomplete in Abram.
 - a. This is why, after Jesus is put to death on that cross and rises triumphant over Satan, sin, and death, do you want to know what He does before He ascends back to the Father? He blesses them: " ⁵⁰ And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. ⁵¹ While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven" (Luke 24:50–51).
 - i. That's how the gospel of Luke ends, and it's how the mission of the church begins!

Living Like a Drink Offering

- A. There's this stunning thing that Paul writes in Phil 2:17 that I've never really gotten over: "Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all." He says in essence, I exist to bless you. That's what my life is all about, to be poured out in your service.
 1. But now where does Paul get the ability, the resources, for such a thing? He can do v. 17 because he knows the Jesus of vv. 6-8. But hear the flow of his thought starting in v. 3: " ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied

himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:3–8).

- B. We let Him serve us. We let Him love us. We let Him bless us. We watch Him die for us. We repent and re-root our faith in Him and that shifts some things in here. That reorients us towards others. We don't need to exploit or manipulate or assault. We too can serve. We too can love. We too can bless.