

"Blessed to Be a Blessing"

Genesis Series: "Decisive Moments"

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July 3, 2011
Genesis 12:1-9

This is one of the most important passages in the entire Bible. In terms of the Old Testament, it's easily in the top 5. (Gen. 1-3, Gen. 12, Ex. 20, Isaiah 53) By the way, the "Abram" in this passage eventually gets renamed "Abraham," and "Sarai" gets renamed Sarah. Abraham and Sarah. Scholars place this event at around 2000 BC. Let's take a look.

Genesis 12:1-9

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. 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 the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

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. Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan,

Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. 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. From there he moved on 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 invoked the name of the Lord. And Abram journeyed on by stages toward the Negeb.

Why is this passage one of the most important in all the Bible? Well, every great movement has a pioneer. Every great effort, every great cause, every great advance in the history of humanity has a great adventurer who blazes a new trail, showing the rest of us a new way to live. The dictionary defines a pioneer as, "One who goes before, as into the wilderness, preparing the way for others to follow."

- Think of Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation
- Or Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights movement.
- Or Christopher Columbus.
- The Pilgrims were certainly pioneers.
- As were 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence, who attached their name to that document 235 years ago tomorrow. They started a new nation, a new people, a new idea, the United States of America.

Well, 4000 years ago, Father Abraham and Mother Sarah heard a call from God and they said yes to God. Their response to God was more a Declaration of De-pendence upon God. And it was the beginning of a new people, a new movement of faith, where life was lived in covenant with God, and they were the pioneers. And this is the passage where it all began.

We're studying the book of Genesis this summer. The first 11 chapters are what commentators call Pre-History. Even most conservative scholars look at these chapters as different from the historical events that follow. The first 11 chapters present grand, epic stories. Two stories or accounts of the Creation of the World. The story of Adam & Eve and the Fall. Then there's the story of Noah and then the Tower of Babel. Creation, Fall, Flood, Tower - that's Genesis 1 - 11. Everything changes in Chapter 12. God breaks into history in a very specific way. *"Abram, go*

from your country . . . to the land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing." God breaks into history and chooses Abraham and Sarah to be the Pioneers of a new movement of faith.

Walter Brueggemann is one of the foremost Old Testament scholars alive today. He happens to be UCC. In Brueggemann's commentary on the book of Genesis he writes this about chapter 12: *"The one who calls the world into being now makes a second call. This call is specific. Its object is identifiable in history. the call is addressed to aged Abraham and barren Sarah. The purpose of the call is to fashion an alternative community in creation gone awry, to embody in human history the power of blessing."* There's a lot in there, but I love the part about, *"The one who calls the worlds into being now makes a second call."*

Abraham and Sarah are called to leave their homeland and journey to a new land. And God promises to be with them every step of the way. And surprisingly, they say "Yes." I say surprisingly because up until this point in the Bible, the response to God haven't been very positive.

- God gave Adam & Eve one rule and they couldn't keep it.
- They have two sons, Cain and Abel, and one ends up killing the other.
- The world gets so bad that God decides to start over with Noah and his family. That plan seems to go ok but the Noah story ends with him getting drunk and embarrassing his children with his "nakedness" (I'm not making that up. See Gen. 9:20-24)
- Then humanity gets the brilliant idea to build a tower up to God. God feels threatened by the Tower of Babel and come down and scatters humanity given them all different languages to speak. Divide and conquer.

You can see a theme running through those stories. Humanity is not responding positively and appropriately to God. But Abraham and Sarah do.

This is a prominent theme in scripture - God is calling. Will you take the call? Isaiah said, "Here I am, Lord, send me." Moses said, "I'm here, Lord, but have you considered my brother Aaron?" Jesus said to the brothers in the boat, "Come follow me and I will make you fish for people. And immediately they left their nets and followed him." (Mark 1:16-20)

My pastor used to tell this story about a missionary and his son walking through a jungle in South America. The father got a little bit ahead of his son and when he turned around to check on him he noticed his son was in immediate danger. He said, "Son, do exactly as I say. Get on the ground and crawl to me quickly." And the son did exactly what his father commanded him to do, which was good because a large snake was hanging from a tree about to strike him. And then my pastor would say, "When God calls you to action, how will you respond? Will you "Trust and obey," as the hymn says?" "So Abram went, as the LORD had told him."

There's another very important concept in this passage that I want to highlight.

It's this - *Abraham & Sarah are blessed to be a blessing.*

The blessing of God, the favor of God that is expressed to them and given to them, is not just for them. They're chosen not to form some elitist spiritual club. They are chosen to be a blessing to others. They are blessed to be a blessing.

Listen to it again: *"I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing . . . in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."* When religious people fail to take these words seriously bad things happen. We can become holier-than-thou and put up large walls around ourselves, believing we're better than everybody else because we've got God's blessings.

St. Paul once wrote *that "God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places."* (Eph. 1:3) - grace, forgiveness, God's acceptance and love, God's Spirit and Joy. But those blessings are not given to puff us up but rather to open us up in order to share God's love and blessings with others.

I remember a Gaither concert I went to two years ago. Toward the end of the intermission there was a sing-a-long. The house lights were still on,

people were mingling back to their seats, while someone on stage led the audience in some songs. I stopped at an entrance way and talked with some friends. When suddenly a man comes up aside me and yells at me to sit down because I was blocking his view. And he yelled at me viciously, as if I'd just stepped on his toe and broke it. He was there to get the blessings of gospel music, but he didn't realize that God's blessings are not something we just keep for ourselves. God's blessings are about building community, strengthening relationships, creating the type of world that God desires. That was Abraham & Sarah's job, the Pioneers of our Faith. That's ours as well.

Think about it.