

# God's Blessing: Given, Received, Extended

*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: 26 September 2021

Preacher: Keith Knowlton

[ 0 : 0 0 ] gospel. And Lord, now we pray that the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts will be pleasing in your sight, Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Now, as I mentioned, we've been going through this sermon series, The Mission of God's People. Last week, we looked at the creation story, how God created Adam and Eve to live in the garden, to rule over creation, to rule and subdue and care for all that God had created.

But today, we've advanced a little bit further in the book of Genesis. We know what happened to Adam and Eve, right? They sinned against God. They were taken out of the garden of Eden. And now they're suffering the curse that is experienced by all earth. And so now we see that this seems like a very quick spiral of humanity here, this downward spiral that's occurring. Wickedness is recounted over and over again in these first few chapters of Genesis. We see in Genesis 6, it actually says this about man at that time, that every inclination of the thought of human heart was only evil all the time. And so if you're familiar with the story that follows the story of Noah, where God decides he's going to destroy the world with a flood, but saves Noah and his family. However, this doesn't eliminate sin by any means. We see that sin persists in the hearts of man. And we come to the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11, where man, again, is motivated by pride and selfish ambition until God comes and confuses their languages and scatters them all over the face of the earth. So this is the setting.

When we walk into Genesis 12, what we're studying tonight, this is the setting, a rather bleak outlook. Man seems to be in a hopeless situation, corrupted by sin, worthy of God's judgment. And yet we see God enter in, come to a single man named Abram, and he promises to bless him. And so this is what I want us to focus on tonight, this blessing. Specifically, I want to think about three things. I want to think about the blessing as it is given, the blessing received, and the blessing extended. So let's look first at the blessing given. Now, if you've grown up in church or you're familiar with Bible stories, maybe you've heard of Abraham before. In this passage, it calls him Abram, but we know that God changed his name when he gave him this promise from Abram to Abraham. Maybe you've heard these stories of Abraham's faithfulness and obedience to God, but it's important to look at how Abraham's life started here. What was Abraham like when he came, when God approached him with this promise? Maybe you have this kind of Sunday school mentality of what Abraham was like, because we've heard all these great stories, right? So you may think, well, Abraham always loved God and God always loved Abraham. But that wasn't actually the case. That's not what the Bible says. When Abram and his family are introduced in Genesis 11, it says nothing of his virtue or his obedience or his faith at all. In fact, if we jump to Joshua 24, it says that Abraham and his family actually served other gods. And so Abraham did not stand out in his day among the other idolaters that he lived with. Abraham himself was a pagan.

But we see that God still came to him and extends a blessing to him. And so we may ask them, well, why did God choose to bless Abraham? If he wasn't special in any way, why didn't he choose somebody else? Why did he choose to bless anybody at all? The fact is the Bible doesn't really give an answer to that story. It doesn't say why God specifically chose to bless Abraham. But we know as we go through the story and the whole arc of the gospel message in the Bible, the simple fact that God chose to love Abraham because God chose to love Abraham. And so that is what grace looks like. And that's what I want us to look at just for a second here. My minister in the States back in South Carolina, he, I remember him talking several times about his own understanding of grace and how it evolved over time. He said early on in his ministry, he defined grace as favor in the absence of merit. And that may sound like a pretty good definition, right? But he said that actually grace is so much more than that. He came to understand that grace is not just favor in the absence of merit. Grace is favor in the presence of demerit.

[ 4 : 50 ] Meaning not only has man done nothing to earn God's favor, we've actually done a lot that we should never deserve God's favor. If we look back at the, we looked at Genesis 12, if we go back to Genesis 11, we see this stark contrast between the acts of man and the promises that are coming of God. We see that over and over again in the story of the, of the, of the, the building of the tower of Babel, what did man say to themselves? Let us make bricks. Let us build a city and a tower. Let us make a name for ourselves.

We see here that man is working by themselves and for themselves. There's no thought of God here. There's no desire to please him or to serve him or to know him. Yet God enters in and he shows his grace.

And so the same is true for each of us. There's nothing good in us that God should be attracted to us. There's nothing that we can possibly do to earn God's favor. And maybe you struggle with this thought.

Maybe you think that man is basically good, that God should be pleased with us because of something that we've done. Sometimes I'm tempted that way myself to think that God and I make a pretty good team, right? That, that God was pretty wise in choosing me because I have some redeemable quality about me.

But that's not what the Bible says. That's not what God teaches us. It says that God chose you and me when we were dead. God chose you and me when we were enemies.

[ 6 : 24 ] And so it's only by his grace that he makes us alive. It's only by his grace that we can become sons and daughters. And so then it's worth looking at then. What is this promise specifically that God makes to Abraham and to his descendants?

Well, first of all, we see that the promise is a promise of posterity. If we look at verse two, God says to Abraham, I will make you a great nation. I will bless you and make you a great name.

If we jump a couple of chapters forward to Genesis 15, it says this. It says, God says to Abraham, he says, look to the north and to the south and to the east and to the west. All the land that you see, I'm going to give this land to you and your descendants.

And so this little insignificant man from the land of Ur, God is promising a future kingdom. Not only that, we see that this promise is actually God is promising his own presence to Abraham and his descendants.

We see throughout this promise here in Genesis 12 and onward, a lot of relationship language that goes with this blessing. We see that God, he's choosing to bless Abraham and he's going to bless those who bless him and he's going to curse those who curse him.

[ 7 : 40 ] We know that this blessing is extended not only to Abraham, but to his son Isaac and beyond. So if we actually look when God talks to Isaac about this blessing, Genesis 28 verse 15, it says this.

Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go. And I will bring you back to this land for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you. So we see in this blessing that God promises his nearness.

God promises his loyalty to Abraham and his descendants. And lastly in this promise, we see that God promises people. He tells Abraham repeatedly that even though he is old and even though he is childless and even though his wife is barren, his descendants are going to number the stars.

And not only that, but through his family, through his descendants, all the nations of the world are going to be blessed. Think about how unbelievable that would have been to Abraham.

That would have been, I mean, naturally would have thought that story is too good to be true, right? And so that brings us to our second point. How is this blessing received by Abraham?

[ 8 : 50 ] Well, we know that this covenant is talked about more than just in Genesis 12 where we just read. If we jump forward to Genesis 15, we actually see the inauguration of this covenant, this covenant ceremony that's performed.

And we see that God tells Abraham, he tells him to do this. He says, take a calf and a goat and a ram. And I want you to cut them in half and lay them out with a walkway between.

And this would have been part of the ceremony that was performed. In fact, it sounds weird to us, but in that day, this would have been a custom that would have been known by two people that are making a contract or a covenant with one another.

That these animals are split, their carcasses divided. The two people meet in the middle and make this covenant, make this agreement. And it symbolizes that if either of them broke this covenant,

that they should suffer the same result as those animals.

And so we see here that something different happens, though. Abraham is given this instruction to lay out these animals, but he doesn't go to meet God in the middle.

[ 9 : 54 ] We see that God puts Abraham into a deep sleep. And God then sends this smoking pot and this flaming torch that crosses through those animals all the way to Abraham.

And so we see this imagery, it symbolizes, it shows us that God has taken this covenant upon himself. That he will be the one to fulfill this covenant.

And if the covenant is broken, he is the one that's going to pay the penalty. And so we read further in Genesis where it talks more about this covenant between Abraham and God and Abraham's descendants.

And we learn that there's a condition that Abraham has to keep as well. Genesis 17, verse 10, God says to Abraham, This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep.

Every male among you shall be circumcised. He continues in verse 14, Any uncircumcised male who has not been circumcised in the flesh will be cut off from his people, for he has broken my covenant.

[ 10 : 57 ] You may think this is kind of weird, right? Why in the world would we have a condition of a covenant that's going to be fulfilled by God, symbolized by something like this? But we see, in fact, that this is talked about in the New Testament.

We read from Galatians earlier here in Romans. Paul is also giving an answer to the sign. He says, Abraham received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.

So we see circumcision was a picture of receiving righteousness by faith. And so this condition that's given to Abraham is not just the circumcision itself.

It's that he needs to have faith. And so that's why it says, Genesis 15, 6, Abraham believed the Lord and it was credited to him as righteousness.

And so this may confuse you. We just finished talking about the grace of God, right? There's nothing that we can earn. There's nothing we can do to earn God's favor. But yet now, as a condition of the covenant, Abraham has to have faith.

[ 12 : 01 ] So isn't having faith, in a way, a means of earning God's favor? Well, think about it this way. When I was growing up in the States, I liked to play football. Of course, we called it soccer.

Probably a lot of you grew up playing as well. And one thing I remember growing up is that professional soccer was kind of coming into its own. It was a new league had just formed when I was young.

The major league soccer. Certainly a far cry from Champions League or any sort of European soccer, but it was big for us in the States at the time. And I remember the closest team to where I lived, it was the Tampa Bay Mutiny.

And they were playing an exhibition game before a season in my town where I lived. And so I went with a lot of my friends from my soccer team and my family, and we watched this exhibition game. And at halftime, they were giving away season tickets to the Mutiny. They were doing this raffle. So you had to look at your ticket that you came in with, and they read out the ticket number, and I actually won the raffle.

[ 12 : 58 ] I won these season tickets to the Mutiny. I got to go down to midfield and receive this certificate, and I got to go to every single home game that Mutiny had that season for free. Now, if you think about it, that having a ticket would have been a necessary condition for me to get into the stadium to watch them play, right?

I could fulfill that condition because I had those season tickets. But I hadn't actually earned those tickets. Those tickets were given to me for free. So being able to fulfill that condition wasn't based on anything that I had actually done.

And so that's a picture of what faith is like for us. Faith is a necessary condition for our salvation. But the fact is, faith itself is a gift from God.

Ephesians 2.8.9 says, For by grace you have been saved through faith. This is not of yourselves. It is a gift of God, not by works that no one can boast. And so we see that Abraham received God's blessing through faith.

So the question is, what did he have faith in, right? It shows that Abraham had faith that God would keep his promise.

[14:08] Obviously, Abraham was long before the coming of the Messiah, Jesus. And he didn't know exactly how that promise was going to be fulfilled, but yet he had faith that God would keep his word.

And we know how that promise was fulfilled, that God would send his son, Jesus, who lived a perfect life, who offered his own body on the cross, as a penalty for our sin.

And so if we go back to that picture that we talked about in Genesis 15 of this covenant being made between God and Abraham, the splitting of these animals that were walked between, we see this relationship between death and the covenant.

These animals had to die in order for this covenant to be made. And now we have Jesus who fulfills this promise by offering his own body and his own blood as a sacrificial victim for this covenant curse.

And so this is what we're going to be celebrating here in a little bit, the Lord's Supper. This is what we are remembering, the sacrifice of our Savior Jesus, who willingly gave of his body and his blood.

[15:14] The blood that he says is of the covenant that was shed for many, and he invites us all to drink of it. And so just like Abraham, he received this blessing through faith in the promise of God.

He was looking forward to the promise and how it would be fulfilled. And so the same holds true for us then. If we are going to have faith, we have faith in the promise that God has given us.

We can look back to how that promise has been fulfilled in the life and death of Jesus who ushers in a new covenant in his blood. And so it doesn't end there, right?

We talk about how this blessing is given by God, how it's received by us through faith, but there's that third element of how this blessing is then extended. You know, as we've already read, God, he tells Abraham that he, at the very beginning of chapter 12, he says, I'm going to make you a great nation.

All nations through you will be blessed. So although God is choosing this one man, in no way is this promise or this blessing supposed to be exclusive. It's not something that Abraham is supposed to hoard.

[16:27] John Piper puts it this way. He says that Abraham was meant to be a conduit of God's blessing and not a cul-de-sac. And so how was it then that Abraham and his descendants were supposed to spread this blessing to all people in all nations?

Well, if we look at the very beginning of Genesis 12, before God even gives this promise to Abraham, he first gives Abraham a command. He says, Go from your country, your people, and your father's household to the land I will show you.

Continuing in verse 4. So Abraham went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abraham 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.

But it doesn't end there. Verse 6. Abraham traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Morah at Shechem. Goes further. Verse 6. From there he went onward toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent there with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east.

Then again, verse 9. Abram then set out and continued toward the Negev. Now, if you're familiar with the story, I think the significance can really be lost. But consider this.

[17:43] Consider how significant of a command this is. Because Abraham, it says, is 75 years old. He's not 22 years old just graduating uni with this desire for adventure.

He is an old man. He has been settled in Haran his entire life. He has an aging wife that he has to take with him. He has an elderly father that he has to leave behind.

And so though Abraham is promised blessing in the future, it's not without disruption and heartache in the present. There's nothing easy or convenient about this command that he receives.

And so thinking back again about my minister in the States who he's friends with, one of the things that he would always stress to us as a church is actually something I got to share with community group leaders not too long ago. is this desire and intention that we should have within the church toward disruption.

That disruption should be a key point in our Christian lives. Because the sooner that we realize that God is not committed to our comfort, the better. How often do we try to fit into our own little

Christian bubbles?

[ 18 : 53 ] We want to be surrounded by our Christian friends. We don't want the awkwardness of having to deal and have these encounters with others that aren't believers because of our faith. We certainly don't want to think about the possibility of God calling us to leave jobs or homes or families for the sake of the gospel.

And so ultimately the problem is that even though we want to focus on the blessing that God has given us, we often overlook the command for obedience that accompanies it.

And so the reality is that those two things go together. God's command and blessing to us is accompanied by that command for obedience. So it says, Christopher Wright says this in the book that we've been following as our guide through this series.

It says, if we are to inherit God's blessing, we also inherit God's mission. And so from the time of Abraham, we see that this mission has not changed at all.

Right? This mission is for God to see the nations blessed through his people. And so we see that this command that God gives Abraham is actually mirrored in the New Testament.

[ 20 : 05 ] We see that Jesus gives this very similar command to his disciples before he ascends to heaven. It's what we call the Great Commission. Right? God tells Abraham to go, to trust and obey so the nations would be blessed.

Likewise, Jesus gives his disciples and he gives us the same command to go and make disciples and baptize them and teaching them to obey, remembering that I am with you always.

And so what does this look like for us? We receive the same blessing that's been given to Abraham. We receive it through faith and now we are called to extend it.

So what does it mean to bless the nations? We've talked a lot about this as a church recently. I really think this is important. This is something that we should have the forefront of our minds. This should be our mission as a church to see the nations blessed starting right here in the Southside community.

Especially now. We think of all that's gone on with this pandemic over the last 18 months with isolation and frustration that we've experienced and now we're starting to feel this return to normalcy, right?

[ 21 : 14 ] And you know what's accompanying that? Ministry opportunities abound. Relationships that need to be made. People that are hurting. We've heard over and over again these last few weeks of all the ministry opportunity that's happening within our church.

Serve with the praise team. Attend the women's Bible study. Help with university students or international students. Help with children's church. Whatever it may be. Get involved in community group.

But the fact of the matter is that the mission of God is not just centralized on the programs that we have here at Buclue. It's so much more than that. And so we need to ask ourselves what are we doing to show love to our neighbors?

How are we going to care for the vulnerable in our community? How are we going to profess the truth of the gospel to those who are lost? I mentioned at the beginning this video of this Olympian who is trying to get people to run on this treadmill willing to give them some free money.

And while the video showed a lot of these people who just walked by refusing to do this challenge because they just thought it was too good to be true, eventually there were these people that recognized the value in doing this who hopped on that treadmill, ran for 30 seconds, and walked away with \$100 or more in their pocket.

[ 22 : 32 ] But it's interesting because it's not only those people that did it, but then the video shows a lot of these people that complete it then pick up their phone and call their friends. Hey, come down here. There's this challenge. You can get some free money but just run on a treadmill.

People that left to go get their coworkers in return because they didn't want them to miss this opportunity. And so let that be our desire as well. May we experience the blessing of the gospel and desire to share that goodness, that treasure that we have with those around us.

May we desire to participate in God's mission to bring all people from every nation, from every tongue and every tribe into new relationship with God the Father, this everlasting covenant that we receive through the blood of Jesus.

Maybe you aren't a Christian. Maybe this is all new to you. The truth is that this promise is being openly extended to you. The blessing of the gospel is available to all.

And so come. You are welcomed by the blood of Jesus to be an everlasting covenant, everlasting relationship with a God who loves you. Let's pray.

[ 23 : 55 ] God, we thank you for your promise to Abraham. We thank you that you were the one who fulfilled that promise through Jesus.