

# Jesus the true and better Abraham

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[ 0 : 00 ] So what we've been doing in church, and we're going to continue doing it for the next couple of months, is to see how the whole story of the Bible invites us to see Jesus, and to think about how every figure that's represented points us to a reality and a fulfillment found in Jesus. So today we're thinking about Jesus as the true and better Abraham. I'm going to give us a really simple image to keep in our heads as we begin, and it's this. Every river has a beginning. 19th century explorers spent years of their life trying to discover the sources, the headwaters of the great rivers of the world. But every river has a beginning, and every river flows somewhere. In Genesis 1-12, which is a vital part of our origin story as the human race, that can be pictured in terms of two rivers, perhaps even two floods.

On the one hand, we have this river that becomes a flood of sin and evil. So we have Adam and Eve eating the fruit they were told not to, and we have Cain murdering his brother Abel. We have, at the time of Noah, worldwide evil, where every heart is turned away from God. And then in the Tower of Babel story, we have humanity gathered together to build this tower to raise their fist against God in heaven. So there's a flood of sin. But there is also, within these opening chapters, a wonderful flood, a river of God's grace. There is this pattern.

Every time that there is sin and there is judgment, there is also mercy and grace. So there's the promise that comes to Adam and Eve that one of their seed will come and enter into battle against the forces of darkness and win a decisive victory. After the flood of God's judgment, the rainbow is put in the sky to say, never again will the earth be destroyed by a flood. And this week, after judgment at the Tower of Babel, grace comes from God in the form of a family tree. Somewhat surprising. We see in these opening chapters both a human pride that wants to reject God and a human pride that wants to be like God. Consider the Babel story that we've just read.

We have this idea that people are progressing. They're learning about technology and tools. Culture is developing, but that technology and those tools are being used in a building project to make a great name for themselves, which is both an act of disobedience against God and an act of saying we are great like God. Technology and tools being used to say we are great.

[ 3 : 07 ] Perhaps as people, we recognize that in some ways we haven't changed so much. It's still very easy for us, either physically or in different ways, to build towers and monuments to the self.

We want to say to the world, we are great. Pride is still one of the great problems in the human heart. So we see that in these chapters, but we also see again and again and again God's gracious response.

And this time we're going to see his gracious response in the covenant promise that he gives. A promise that he gives to Abraham, to the world, to you and to me today.

And to think about that river image, the promise given to Abraham, it's like the headwater. It's like the source from which God's wonderful promises will flow through time and history.

So let's get into Abraham's story. I've got three things to think about with us. First of all, the idea of Abraham and new beginnings. So I think we mentioned this a couple of weeks ago. The word Genesis is to do with the idea of beginnings. And in the book of Genesis, we find a series of new beginnings. And they are marked out by family trees. Whenever we find a family tree, in the book of Genesis, it's like a chapter division. It's telling us God is going to do something new in the story of salvation. He is going to, in a new way, show kindness to people who don't deserve kindness.

[ 4 : 42 ] And after the judgment that falls on Babel, the confusion, the scattering, God's response of grace is to show us this family tree, this genealogy, and the focus that falls on one family and on one man, the man Abraham, becomes known as the father of faith. Two things to notice about this new beginning.

First, to just think for a little bit about the person. Who is Abraham? I don't know if you noticed this, but there's an interesting preparation. So God is going to call Abraham to leave everything, to leave his family, to leave his land, and to go. That's already happened in his family before. In verse 31 of chapter 11, we find Tira, his dad, doing exactly that with Abraham and with his family. We're not told why, but his father begins this journey to Canaan. And we're not sure why he stopped and he never gets there. But we do know that the God who knows everything and nothing is wasted in God's economy has given Abraham this experience of what it is like to uproot everything to go to a new land. We also need to recognize that when God calls Abraham, we can see this as a very unpromising situation. He makes these promises about being a great nation, but look at verse 30, what we discover about Abraham's wife, she's childless and not able to conceive. And bearing in mind that Abraham is 75 years old, this is a very unpromising situation from a human point of view.

This is going to need God's intervention. This is going to be one of the many stories that gives glory to God. Whenever God intervenes and has mercy and shows grace, it's intended to give glory to God. We also see in this focus on Abraham that God's plan for a godly line continues.

So there's this theme that emerges is that God in his kindness is going to be choosing people and saving people and rescuing people. So it came in the form of a promise to Adam and Eve that one of their seeds would come and be the great champion for the people of God. And then we see Abel and Seth being identified as this godly line. And then in the midst of worldwide evil, God shows grace to Noah and saves him. And then he does exactly the same thing with Abraham. That God has this design that this line will continue. And this is really striking when we remember, this is one thing that's not in our text, but it's in the Bible. In Joshua chapter 24, one other thing we know about Abraham is that he was a pagan who worshipped idols. So before God called him, he was just like everyone else in Babel, worshipping false gods, worshipping self. And God's grace came and changed him. Into that confusion and into that darkness, God chooses, God saves, and God transforms. That's God's way. And every one of us here who is a Christian can testify, that is God's way. So that's the person, when we think about these new beginnings, it centers on this person, Abraham. But I also want to notice a couple of patterns, one that I've already mentioned a little bit. God's covenant promise, and here we have a covenant promise. It involves this pattern, this principle, that God chooses one for the sake of many.

[ 8 : 34 ] The story previous to Babel, God chose Noah out of the whole world that had turned against him. He chose to save one so that humanity could be preserved. And now, again, as the world is gathering together in defiance of God, he chooses one man. He chooses Abraham. And why does he choose Abraham?

End of verse 3, so that all peoples on earth will be blessed through you, one for the many. Abraham's family will eventually become the nation of Israel. And God makes promises to Israel, and chooses them, but says to them, you are to be a light for the world, one for the sake of many. And it's the same when it comes to their great king, King David. He is to represent the rule of God on the earth, drawing people to worship as he reveals God's glory. So that one for the sake of many becomes really important, especially as we recognize that God chooses to send Jesus for the sake of many, to be the Savior. There's another pattern, though. There's a number pattern. In Genesis chapter 3 to 11, there is a theme that keeps coming back. It's a negative theme. It's a theme of curse.

Five times we're told that the world or different people stand under God's curse. And to be under God's curse is the idea of being under God's judgment, and to be separate from God and his goodness.

But if you look with me at chapter 12, and if you do your numbers, verses 2 and 3, you will find five times the word bless. And this tells us that God is choosing one man, Abraham, and making a promise to him so that the curse will be reversed. That honestly, you and I deserve curse, but God is so kind that he would give blessing. And he will give blessing through this godly line and the promise of salvation. Let me just think about how that applies to you and I today, as we recognize that God's grace brings new beginnings. This story of Abraham is really the turning point in the story of mankind, of all the news headlines, of all the stories of the human race that you will read about this week, there is none more important than this moment here. Because again, we are discovering God's commitment to show love to people that haven't earned it and people that haven't deserved it.

[ 11 : 31 ] It's being revealed. Here is the answer for our disobedience being revealed. Here is the answer to the hate and the murder, to the cruelty and the wickedness, to our worship of self. It's found in God's grace. While there is that flood of sin and we experience and it separates us from God and it places us under judgment, God acts in grace, calling the one, bringing blessing, not curse, restoring us to life in special relationship with God and all through Jesus.

And that's an invitation today. If you're not a Christian, there's always that invitation to new beginnings because of God's grace. And a second thing that we need to see is that Jesus is God's chosen one who brings grace. It's interesting to notice in the stories that we tell, especially the great and the epic stories, how often that theme of the one who is chosen to rescue a world or a kingdom. I was talking about the Matrix this week, Neil, the one, or Mulan if you like Disney, the one chosen to rescue and say, it's a theme that's deeply influenced by the story of the Bible. It is shaped by Christianity because God's own Son is sent to be the Savior and the rescuer.

When the people looked at Jesus, they saw very unpromising beginnings. He comes from a poor family, from an unimportant town. The king of the day tried to kill him, but this Jesus, he comes to rescue, to give new beginnings, to give eternal life. And his way to bring blessing is to take the curse for us.

That's the way the curse can be reversed. Jesus takes it. The separation from God, the judgment from God, he knows it, he knows it as he is judged in the place of sinners so we can enjoy blessing. And so God comes to us in his grace and he calls to us and he says to us, listen, leave behind your failed building project, seeking our own glory, looking to build our own identity without him.

[ 14 : 05 ] And he invites us to come, to enjoy life with him, to be part of his kingdom, and then to be on his mission. So that's Abraham and new beginnings. And an essential part of new beginnings, secondly, is Abraham and this new promise that is received. Again, to go back to that river analogy, 19th century geographers and adventurers, folks like David Livingston, spent years of their life trying to find the source of those great rivers, so the Zambezi and the Nile. You know, they were all charted at that time. There was that great drive to find where are the sources, where are the points of connection. And it's really interesting to see that the New Testament authors, they do exactly the same thing with God's covenant promise. As they understand that God has shown so much kindness to them in Jesus, they want to follow that upstream to find out where does this all come from?

That's why we read the book of Galatians, where Paul follows that mighty river of God's grace that flows to us in Jesus and sees that it fulfills those promises made to Abraham.

So we're going to look at Genesis 12, 1 to 3, just for a few moments, and notice three features together. First, recognize that this is God's grace. This is all of grace. Notice who speaks, the Lord said to Abraham. And look who's acting. This is God. I will make you into a great nation.

I will bless you. I will make your name great. I will bless those who bless you. Christianity is always a top-down religion. We are not trying to climb the ladder to get up to God with our goodness. We're not trying to build our way up to God. He is simply too holy. We are simply too sinful. God must come down. And in Jesus, He has, He does. God takes the initiative to speak to this pagan, to this idol worshiper, to change His heart. God commits Himself in a special relationship.

[ 16 : 23 ] And notice the contrast. So the people at the Tower of Babel, what did they want to build? They wanted to build a tower, but they wanted to make a great name for themselves. But look what God does as He comes to Abraham. He says, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

So there's grace. There's also guarantee. So these are wonderful promises, big promises. They take time to be fulfilled. But Abraham is invited to live by faith because these promises are a guarantee, because they're rooted in God's character and God's commitment. Look at what he guarantees to Abraham.

He guarantees that he will take him and give him the land that he will show him. He guarantees him a great family. Remember, his wife is childless. I will make you into a great nation. And he promises that special relationship. I will bless those who bless you. Whoever curses you, I will curse. And Abraham will discover this principle that we sang about, that the Lord will be by His side at every point in His journey of faith. And so it is for all of God's people. So there's a guarantee. And notice thirdly, so there's grace, there's a guarantee. Notice too that this promise ultimately is global.

Again, we mention it, end of verse 3, all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. So it comes directly to one family by that principle, one for the sake of the many. This promise will become this

river of grace, this flood of grace that will go to all nations, and especially as Jesus comes. One thing I want us to think about just for a moment is that in these verses, God is coming to someone who is worshiping a false god, and in His grace He is offering hospitality.

[ 18 : 25 ] God is saying to Abraham, you are free to come in. It's an invitation in. In many ways, it's a promise that takes us back to Eden. The story of the Garden of Eden, that land where Adam and Eve lived, that was God's land. Adam and Eve were the family that God blessed. And Adam and Eve enjoyed a special relationship with God. They were made in His image. They talked with God. They worshiped God.

And here's the wonderful thing. Even though people, including Abraham, have sinned terribly, even though people like us have sinned and sinned terribly, God is ready to show grace, to welcome people back to Himself, to give people what we don't deserve, a way back to life with Him, to life as it was meant to be.

So that we as people, we don't need to be like the people at Babel, scattered and confused. We don't need to be like Cain, restless wanderers far away from God. Rather, God comes near in Jesus and gives the promise of home. And how that happens, Paul makes clear in Galatians chapter 3. So we read in Galatians 3, there's that sense that the floodgates open. So let me just read again Galatians 3 and verse 8. Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith and announce the gospel in advance to Abraham. This blessing from God, which comes through Jesus, comes to all who have faith, regardless of where we come from or our background, we can be justified, we can be declared in right standing with God if we trust in Jesus. How does that happen? Well, he continues, Galatians 3.

We're told that Christ Jesus redeemed us from the curse of the law. The law condemns us because we've broken the law, and so we stand under judgment. Jesus comes and He fulfills, He completely obeys the law, and then He takes the penalty for breaking of the law. He takes the curse so that the blessing given to Abraham might come through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. Our response to all the wonderful things that God has done, Paul says it's to have faith, like Abraham, to trust God's provision and His promise and to receive it for ourselves. But it's a wonderful picture. Think about any great river, the River Nile, still, I think, the source of life for Egypt. God's powerful grace, that river of grace, has transforming and life-giving power, and He is willing to give us that. He invites us to trust Him that we would be adopted into His family, that we would be blessed. Here's the last thing to talk about, Abraham and new worship. We've already been picking up on this journey theme, that God's promise goes on a journey, a journey that takes us to

Jesus as final destination and flows from Jesus to all who have faith in Him. But there's another obvious journey in Genesis 12, and that's the physical, actual journey that Abraham is called to make.

[ 22 : 10 ] The Lord said to Abraham, go from your country, your people, and your father's household to the land I will show you. Now, if you've read any accounts of pioneers, adventurers, those 19th century geographers, if you've had any interest in Livingston's travels or Shackleton's expeditions, if you read their accounts, you will get a sense of the great amount of preparation that had to be made, the many adversities that were faced along the way, and you also get those reflections on encountering natives and interactions with them. But Moses doesn't take us there. Instead, Moses wants to focus on just two aspects of Abraham's journey. One, he leaves, and two, he sacrifices. And both of these matter.

So he's heard God's call in verse 1, and we're told in verse 4, so Abraham went as the Lord had told him. Here is the cost of discipleship. Here's the cost of following for Abraham. He must leave his home, which represent some of the great sources and centers of power and influence in the world in his day.

He must leave those. He must leave friends and family. He must leave home and security. He becomes an exile, a pilgrim sent by God into the world, but not like the people of Babel were sent into the world, scattered and confused. Not like how Cain was sent into the world, a restless wanderer.

So he is sent knowing that God goes with him. We know this in verse 7. As he arrives in the land, the Lord appears to Abraham and speaks to him, speaking the promise again, to your offspring, I will give this land. Again, he knows the Lord is by his side as he leaves. He leaves in a covenant where God has committed to him. But he also sacrifices. Verse 7, as God spoke to him, he built an

altar there to the Lord. And then we're told about another movement where he pitches his tent with Bethel on one side, Ai on the other. There he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord. One more pattern we find in the early chapters of Genesis is that after God shows grace and kindness, his people respond by worshiping with a sacrifice. So we read of Abel sacrificing. We read of Noah sacrificing. Now we read of Abraham sacrificing. He is representing God in the world. In fact, he kind of functions like a priest. By his worship, he is revealing to the people around him who the true God is, and that this true God deserves worship. He leaves and he sacrifices. Just like every epic story, those journeys of people on a quest to save, every fairy tale about the prince who must rescue the princess locked in the castle and slay the dragon. There are sacrifices there is cost in order to accomplish the mission. So Abraham leaves and goes and gladly sacrifices as he goes on God's mission to bring blessing to the world. He is a true worshiper living with faith and obedience, giving to us a picture of the Christian disciple. For you and I to follow Jesus is to live a lot like Abraham. It involves cost, to deny ourselves, to give our loyalty to the Lord, to become exiles, to say, do you know what, this world is not my true home.

And we go on a mission every day. We go on a mission that we seek to make Jesus known. So the New Testament says we are a kingdom of priests. That's our calling.

[ 26 : 22 ] Many of us have probably left our homes, the places where we grew up in, to come to the city and to be in this church today. And you may find in the city of Edinburgh, in your studies or your work, new ways you will discover where you need to be ready to count the cost and to carry the cross.

And that's true for every Christian, just as it was true for Abraham. There is this call to us to leave and to go. Remember, Jesus said to his disciples, to his church, go and make disciples.

Recently in our denomination, our church, the free church, we've been thinking about the need that there is for more ministers. The needs of Scotland are so great. We need people who would be willing to leave and go, to count the cost, to bring good news.

The same is true for the work of global mission. We need to be ready to hear that call to leave and go. So the story of Abraham gives us a picture of the Christian disciple.

But wonderfully, the story of Abraham gives us a picture of Jesus, the true and better Abraham. Jesus is the one who leaves home, leaves the glory of heaven, where he was worshipped by angels, to enter this world to become one of us. Jesus leaves in full and glad obedience. He is the faithful worshipper, always concerned for the Father's glory, always doing the Father's command all the way to the cross.

[ 28 : 08 ] Jesus sacrifices. His altar is the cross. The sacrifice he offers is his own life. His whole life is one of humble service. But then at the cross, he lays down his life. Takes the curse. Endures judgment that we might receive blessing.

As Jesus left and went, he went with a promise from his Father. Gen 22, I will make the ends of the earth your possession. He knew that he was God's way to bring blessing to all peoples on the earth. So he had a promise.

And Jesus also brings a promise. This promise that the river of God's grace, that came to Abraham, that flows through history, flows to his people still.

God's grace would come to you and to me today, bringing life in him and life with him, forgiveness of sin and eternal life, if we have faith.

faith that Jesus is the promised one. Faith that Jesus is God's way for us to know life with him and true blessing. Let me pray for us briefly. Our Father in heaven, we thank you.

[ 29 : 39 ] God bless you.