

Genesis 12:1–9

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Date: 13 June 2021

Preacher: David Helm

[0 : 00] You think about what he's doing with us as Christ Church. I mean, right now, as we sit on grass, awaiting the not so distant day when we gather under stained glass.

Believe me, you and I will look back on the next few months almost as though they were a dream. You will recount these days for the remainder of your life.

For nearly 24 years, we have been a church wandering from place to place. But I'm reminding you that we stand on the verge of entering our own space.

For the better part of 1,200 consecutive Sundays, we have set up and torn down. But in a few short months, we will walk in and sit down.

Can you imagine it? It's nearly a quarter of a century in the making. What lessons must we learn today, this morning?

[1 : 15] What do we need to know before we enter what you could call a new land? What must you and I get right out here before we get in over there?

Just a few short blocks away from this text. Simply this, that God brings his people in with designs to send them out. I like the way that sounds.

Let me say it again. That God brings his people in with designs to send them out. That's what this text will put before us today.

That God is bringing you in to send you on. And I want to prove it by preaching on the promise and the pattern found in Genesis 12, 1 through 9.

The promise and the pattern. The promise is given to Abram, verses 1 to 6. The pattern is started by Abram, verses 7 to 9. The promise involves the giving of land and life.

[2 : 21] But the pattern involves a brief giving of thanks. And then he left. Abraham, I believe, could have written the lyrics, these boots were made for walking.

And as you're going to see in the text, he demonstrates that the land was meant for leaving. Those are the lessons for us here today. The promise in 1 to 6 is here to lead us into Christ.

But the pattern describes the ongoing wanderings of Christian life. Let's take a look. The promise, verses 1 to 6. In the opening movement of our text, we find Abram commanded to go in verses 1 to 3.

And that he went in verses 4 to 6. By the look of verse 1, the going was going to be intense. 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.

Notice the notion of going came by way of a command. It required a leaving of country and kindred. Let me illustrate on a far lesser scale Abraham's intensity in leaving.

[3 : 45] The year was 1996. I was in a men's Bible study on a Saturday morning. And the teacher was unfolding these very verses.

And they were confirming for me, in many respects, the work that God had been doing in me and in my family and in a number of families to get up from where we were and to go to a land we did not know.

Some of you don't know that 37 adults and their children set out on a journey to found this church nearly a quarter of a century ago. And for me, it wasn't easy, although it was exciting.

For me, I left the town I had been raised in. Left the streets that we grew up in. Left the place where I had gone to school.

Where my wife and I had met, knowing each other even from ages 8 and 9. Met and then married all of the country and the kindred and the remaining was stirring up within me as the teacher was speaking about Abraham's call to go.

[5 : 07] To add more severity to Abraham's intensity, certainly in ways that surpass any of our own experiences, his revolved around a land yet unknown.

Did you notice that? That's kind of the way God works. Go to a land you do not know. Requires faith.

Abraham's journey was one that required faith. It's the book of Hebrews that spells that out decisively for any reader when they're trying to interpret the story of Abraham.

Abraham, by faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out not knowing where he was going.

That's intense. That's intense. That's intense. And it's true for you individually. A life of faith.

[6 : 09] And it's true for our young and burgeoning faith family. As we prepare to enter into something that we have not yet ever been in together before.

According to verses two and three, the intensity of his going came with an incentive that looked great. Take a look at that incentive. Verses two and three.

And I will make of you a great nation and I will bless you. And I will make your name great so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you. And in him who dishonors you, I will curse. And in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Abraham's going was tied to the promise. The promise of God giving both land and life.

A blessing. That word blessing five times over used in the text. This multivarigated blessing. This blessing that comes with multiple rewards.

[7 : 09] These moments of repetitive sequential impact. Land, which was a place. Nation, which is a people.

An extension of God's goodwill to all the families dwelling at the outermost edges of the earth. That is all peoples. What a promise. A place. A people.

Something for all peoples. When it comes to these promises. A place. A people. And all peoples. Some things of importance need to be said.

Let me say a word about land. place. You certainly know that this relatively small rectangle of geography to which Abram came continues to be a source not only of religious importance but contention. Land is often tied to contention. The cities mentioned here covering Abram's sojourning, Shechem and Bethel, are within today's contested West Bank. Shechem of verse 6 points to Nablus, Palestinian Authority City, some 40 miles to the north of Jerusalem. Bethel in verse 8 is modern-day Betim, 12 miles north of Jerusalem. It's been occupied by Israel since 1967 and on the whole the West Bank is divided into eight regions. It has 167 Palestinian, literally like islands. It has 290 Israeli settlements and on the contemporary scene, the land is yet a matter of ultimate concern and contention. From May 6th to 21st, just last month, it erupted again with a planned decision of the Supreme Court of Israel to evict four Palestinian families in eastern Jerusalem.

Israel and the Palestinian authorities clash over it. The significance of land, this land in this text, is continually a hotbed of contention. More on that in a minute.

[9 : 22] But secondly, a word on the promise that Abram would become not only a person who goes into a place but he would become a people, a great nation. Can you just consider this for a moment?

That the first readers of the text may very well have been the generation of Joshua's day and in the scripture reading that we had for this morning, they would be looking back on their own family history, that they would understand the importance as they sat on the grass before entering into the land of all that God had in store. They knew that Abram bought a grave plot in this land and that's the only piece of property that he ever owned. They knew that Isaac and Jacob were buried in that land, the only land that they ever had.

They knew that Joseph even had asked, commanded that his bones be carried back to this land. And they would marvel that after decades of their own setting up and tearing down, which were now coming to an end, they found themselves on one side of the Jordan, seated on grass, awaiting the not so distant day when they would dwell in prepared homes that while requiring the restoration others had actually built.

The text would have reminded them that God had brought them together for such a time as this. And that's why I asked, do you and I, do we understand the significance of this season?

[11 : 22] Is it possible from a small family, nothing less than a global family represented by multiple nations, and even more significantly by their closely held ethnicities would one day emerge based

on the faith and the activity of their own entering.

Yes, the land is contentious. Yes, the land is consequential. But even more so here, the land is prophetically called to bring a blessing to all peoples.

Evidently from Abram's family, all the families of the earth were to be blessed. The verses we heard read this morning are the most extraordinary moment of positive reversal in the storyline of Genesis.

Until now, we have seen through one man, Adam, sin taking its way to all the families of the earth, even in the power of death.

But now, with these verses, through one man, Abram, all the families of the earth are promised re-entrance into a salvation and the promise of life.

[12:58] In fact, you need to know that the opening line in Matthew declares that Jesus is the son of Abraham, the rightful heir to the promises of God given to Abram here.

Matthew's Gospel closes with Jesus declaring on the basis of his death and resurrection that now all authority had been given to him by God for the purpose of blessing, for the purpose of extending forgiveness of sins to all the people of the earth.

And that was a message that his disciples were now to go. Just as Abraham was to go, his disciples now were to go and to tell the ends of the earth.

And all of this is there before Abraham. And in verses four to six, having been told to go, he went. He went.

Although it required faith in the leaving of all that he held dear. Let me read it to you again. So Abram went, as the Lord had told him.

[14:02] And Lot with him, Abram was 75 years old when he departed from Haran. Boy, never let anybody tell you, you can't enter the most significant work of your life in the midst of your eighth decade.

And Abram took Sarah's 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 the land of Canaan. And when they came to the land of Canaan, they had passed through to the land of the place of Shechem to the Oak at Mora.

And at that time, the Canaanites were in the land. The land is now his.

The promise had been fulfilled. Yet, for Abram, the land was consequential, but not ultimate.

What God had given him was consequential, but not ultimate. Let me take you back to Hebrews chapter 11 and verse 9.

[15:11] By faith, he went in to live in the land of promise as in a foreign land. Living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.

For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. This is an extraordinary moment.

In Acts 7, Stephen will preach a sermon with his subsequent stoning being the best accounting we have for the permanent rupture between Judaism and Christianity.

At least in respect to how those two faiths view land. When Stephen preached his sermon, he had been accused of speaking against this place, namely the temple and Jerusalem and all that it represented according to God's promises for land.

And his argument in his sermon was simply, well, do you not remember that God showed up to Abraham long before he was in this place? And that he was with Joseph even while he was in Egypt and in prison.

[16:31] And that he was with Moses and spoke to him when he was out in the wilderness. I mean, Abraham's faith to not hold this land as ultimate is indicated by Stephen as something that we all need to consider.

God used the land, but as you see in the pattern, it was a land meant for leaving.

The promise, land and life, one to six. The pattern started, he left, verses seven to the end.

The surprise here is incredible. Can I read it for you again? Then the Lord appeared to Abraham and said to your offspring, I will give this land.

You're here.

[17:54] Here, you've arrived. And the surprise comes in the two things that he does. He builds an altar and then he journeys on.

Take a look at the way seven and eight read. So he built an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to him. From there, he moved to the hill country on the east side 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. And Abraham journeyed on, still going toward the Negev.

If the promise was land and life, the pattern started. It's that the land is something he left.

Notice two things. He built an altar. He did it twice. It's ironic. Cain built a city. Abraham builds an altar. It's an act of worship. It's an act of thanksgiving.

[18 : 57] It was last done in Genesis by Noah. It's complete with the calling on the name of the Lord, which we saw happening in the days of Seth. It's in the midst of the high places.

You remember the Canaanites are here. So this idea here in verse six about the oak of Morah is later in the scriptures described as the hill at Morah.

And the hill were the places of the high, the high places where altars were built to the gods of Baal and the Ashtoreth, the Semitic gods. And all the people would have been offering their praises to God.

Abraham goes there to a place that is offering worship to false gods, and he builds his own altar to give thanks. And then he moves south to 20 miles and does the same thing again.

When God fulfills his promises, he sets the pattern of giving thanks. But this is where I want to sit until we close.

[19 : 56] The text says he journeyed on. This is the surprise for all of Abraham's going, for all of his arriving. The great shock of the text comes with instant departing.

After getting into the land and pausing to give thanks, he was determined to journey on. Did you catch the verbs of perpetual motion in the text?

Verse four, so Abram went. Verse four, he departed. Verse five, they set out. Verse six, he passed through.

Verse eight, from there he moved. Verse nine, he journeyed on. And if we were to read the very next verse, you would see that he was even willing to leave the land itself.

But there was a famine in it. And he went down to Egypt. In fact, in the book of Genesis, there are eight more instances where Abraham is pulling up stakes.

[21 : 01] And moving on after being placed where God had promised. The last of which will be in chapter 21, where he sojourns many days in the land of the Philistines.

Let me see if I can illustrate the significance of it for you and me. Have you ever wanted to go on a vacation, one of those all inclusives? In the old days, you would have picked up a brochure.

Now you just look online. But you would have picked up a brochure and you would have seen pictures of the pool and the ocean. You would have seen the swim up bars and the clean rooms.

You would have thought of all the things that those pictures promised. You would have probably put it with you in your purse or your handbag or your carry on.

And you would look at it even on the plane while you were going. But once you arrived, once you checked in, once you were there, the brochure would go in the waste can.

[22 : 06] Because the real thing was before your very eyes. And do you see the uniqueness of Abraham as a father of faith?

For Abraham, his sojournings confirm that the land was meant for leaving. His journeying on tells you that he held that the land was nothing more than a vacation brochure.

For heaven was the place with water beside the shore. There are lessons for you here today, in this moment, this morning.

This world is not your home. You're just a passing through. Your treasures are yet laid up somewhere beyond the blue.

You. Get it and bury it in your mind, especially if you're young. You were meant for wandering and nomadic days all your life.

[23 : 24] Let me put it to you clearly in regard to what's going to happen in the next couple of months. Our building is not our destination. It is a departure gate.

Do you understand that? Do we get it? Having arrived, he intends for us to go. It is not our destination.

It is the place from which we depart. The ship may be safe in the harbor, but it is set to sail on the open seas. God brings his people in with designs to send them out.

And he is bringing us in to send us on. That's what Galatians 3, verse 8, stipulates concerning this promise to Abraham from our faith, that from this promise, the gospel was to be proclaimed to all the families of the earth.

Charles Spurgeon laid the foundation stone of the Metropolitan Tabernacle on August 16th, 1859. It was the day he entered into his building and he addressed a gathered crowd with these words, quote, the Christian church was designed from the first to be aggressive.

[24 : 39] It was not intended to remain stationary at any period, but to advance onward until its boundaries became commensurate with those of the world. It was spread from Jerusalem to all Judea, from Judea to Samaria, from Samaria to the uttermost parts of the earth.

It was not intended to radiate from one central point only, but to form numerous centers from which its influence might spread to the surrounding parts.

That's informative for what's going to transpire in our lives by the middle of this fall. Lord willing. God brings us in to send us on.

He's provided a building in stone for us to plant the gospel in foreign soil. A building may provide the illusion of security, but it is church planting and global gospel partnerships that secure blessing. Brick and mortar can give you a meeting place, but the mission is tied to the proclamation of a message. I open the sermon with a question.

[25 : 48] Do you ever wonder what God is doing with us? I mean, right now, as we sit on grass, waiting the not so distant day when we gather under stained glass. What lessons must we learn before entering into the new land?

What must you get right here before you get in there? From this text, simply this, that God brings his people in with designs to send them out.

That God is bringing us in with intention to send us on. And if we should ever lose our identity as sojourners, we will forfeit our calling as a church.

You are not on the verge of coming to sit and rest. For the pews of Christ Church Chicago for 50 years must be filled as a launching pad for the gospel work.

You know, I'm done. I hear a lot in these days about the need to bring resources to Woodlawn.

[26 : 57] And in some sense, that's true. But don't sell these blocks short. Don't demean our own citizenry.

Not by patronage or perceived perception. Be willing to consider the power of God and the purpose of his work. It isn't going to be so much about reaching Woodlawn.

It's going to be about God's plan to reach the world with the people who live, who follow him in Woodlawn.

So if you think that Christ Church Chicago is a place simply for you rather than what God wants to do in and through you, then you have missed the glories of the Christian text.

He is sending you in with intention to send you out with heavenly Father, we think of these days when we are O Lord, but few.

[28 : 29] We think of these days when in a dreamlike way they will be eclipsed with things that are solid and fixed.

Lord, help us to know what we need to know now. Help us to learn that the promise is to lead us to Christ.

But the pattern describes the ongoing wanderings of Christian life. May we embrace that with faith in Jesus' name.

Amen.