

Abraham's Blessings to the Nations

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[0:00] Thank you so much for having me.

It's a great privilege to be here. I was born and raised in Norway, but we are in the States now for a short time. My wife is from California. The kids could not be with us today because they got sick. So it's unfortunate as a part of having three small kids. Sarah is five, Isabella is three and Zachariah is eight months. So this is the part of life.

I want to share, I'll start with sharing a few things about my, actually my first, some of my first introduction to really good liturgy.

You know, I was raised in the low church in Norway. But my first year of official theology study was actually at an Anglican theological institute, the Wycliffe Hall in England.

[1:09] You might be familiar with it. And I was raised in a low church. I don't think I almost ever took communion growing up. It's kind of attached to the Lutheran church, but it's more like a laid-driven movement.

And during my year in England, it was the first time I got to appreciate and started to think about confessions and liturgy and especially the Book of Common Prayer.

And I never really thought about it before because I was not introduced to it at a younger age. And I started attending an Anglican church, St. John's Church, outside of Oxford.

And it was a beautiful experience. And it was very interesting to kind of be introduced, you know, to the Book of Common Prayer, which I think is one of the, maybe one of the most important theological books written in history.

And it's a masterpiece in so many ways. And I know it transformed so much of England and really the world afterwards. So I am very thankful to the Anglican Theological Institute for helping me to think through these things and also being an instrument that brought me to where I'm at now.

[2:17] So I'm very grateful for that. And as I was in England and I walked through the streets at Oxford, there was a very famous memorial that some of you might have seen with Latimer, Ridley and Cranmer.

And as I was studying these things, I remember walking through the streets of Oxford and seeing this monument of these wonderful martyrs, you know, who gave their life for Christ and for the Protestant Reformation.

And I was just reminded about the tremendous courage that they showed. There's a brief historical update.

When the young King Edward I died in 1553, his half-sister Mary, better known as Bloody Mary, for just given that title for good reasons, took over the throne.

And she was a staunch Catholic and started to persecute and kill Protestants. And in the midst of this turmoil, prominent theological leaders in the Protestant world, Eusebius Ridley, Nicholas Ridley and Thomas Cranmer became Protestants and started preaching these Protestant doctrines.

[3:23] This is at the time where if you preach these things, you know, you can get a death penalty. And these people were willing to step out and to preach things that were very unpopular.

And they knew that these things could get them killed. They were willing to walk into the unknown and really to trust in the Christ of the Bible. Just like Abraham, which we will look in the text.

And it brings us back to the question, like, where do we put our trust? And Cranmer, Ridley and Latimer, as well as Abraham, were sentenced to death and burnt at the stake. All three were found guilty because they refused to accept transubstantiation.

And the process by which the wine and bread offered during communion becomes the body and blood of Christ. It's an amazing thing almost, like different views of communion.

Like you're willing to sacrifice your life for that because they thought that expressed greater truths. And at this time, there was no guarantee that the Protestant Reformation would succeed.

[4:27] So they could, you know, sacrifice all these things for nothing. They didn't know what we know now. And Latimer said to Ridley, as they were burnt at the stake, it's a very famous quote.

Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England, as I trust shall never be put out.

I mean, imagine yourself being burnt at the stake. There's a very powerful queen that crushes all opposition. There is no evidence at all that suddenly, like, England is going to be Protestant.

People are going to start reading the Bible. At this time, you know, they looked like the losers.

When you go into the Oxford Street, you'll see this beautiful monument that reminds us about these great martyrs of Christ.

But there was a prophetic word almost here. And it's an amazing thing to say that at the moment of your death, when you're being publicly humiliated, that you would say something like this.

[5:31] Very prophetic. In that particular time and place, it was an amazing thing to say. That the death would lead to victory.

How on earth can three guys being burnt at the stake lead to a fire that's never going to be extinguished? That doesn't make rational sense to us as human beings. But it points towards a greater truth.

That there is an unlimited potential in a person that God can use to take a courageous stand. We know that with Martin Luther, the Reformers. And we know that today as well.

That courage is the rarest of the virtues. It's also the most important one. And it's a virtue that God can give us. And we see the fruit of this today. You know, the Book of Common Prayer would be one.

The Reformation. And really how England afterwards really, in many ways, brought the Gospels and missionaries to all over the world. And has impacted Norway. Bible translations, a lot of that came from England.

[6:31] So our country has reaped tremendous blessings from these guys being burnt at the stake. Who were willing to stick their necks out and die for their fate. And that points us towards someone else.

Because these people did look back. And it all starts with Abraham. Or Abraham, as he is called before his name changes. And we're going to look at how Abraham's blessing was brought to the nations.

And we're going to look at three different things in this text. It's Genesis 12, verse 1 to 4. Number one. What is happening in the text? We see that God is speaking to Abraham.

That's what's happening in the text. Number two. God commands Abraham. So God speaks to Abraham. And God commands Abraham. It's the content of what's being said.

And number three. God promises Abraham. There are promises attached to what God speaks. What he commands. And all of this is given to Abraham.

[7:36] So he ought to bring the blessings to the nations. Let's look at what's happening in the text. And God speaks to Abraham. Verse 1. In the first part. God speaks to Abraham.

Exalted father. Which is the name of Abraham. God. Not Abraham. It's very important to keep in mind here.

It is God who is speaking. We know the Tower of Babel before. We know the story. Probably from our childhood. And as well as adults. That the Tower of Babel.

And it comes before this story. In Genesis 12. It is a story of how man is trying to work. To build. To achieve righteousness with God.

By their own works. The Tower of Babel. Is man or people trying to do things in their own power. Not in God's power. We're going to do it without God.

[8:30] We're going to get up to the heavens. We're going to replace God. We don't need God to do things. We are trying to work hard. So we can achieve righteousness with God. It's man's attempt.

To build something. That's based upon. A humanistic approach. Really trying to replace God. That doesn't end well. When man tries to achieve righteousness.

And greatness. Without starting with God. They end up in the wrong place. The Tower falls apart. With all the languages. It comes as a result of that. But with Abraham.

It almost seems that God is trying to do something different. He's trying to do it in a different way. It's not man trying to build the Tower from below and up. Now it's God trying to speak from heaven and down.

It starts with God speaking. Not with man speaking. In Babel. People try to make themselves God. And speak on God's behalf. Babel is man's work.

[9:29] But here we see. It's God's work. It was the voice of God. That gave life to creation. It was the voice of Jesus. It was God that brought Lazarus to life.

And it was the voice of God that regenerated Abraham. And made him capable of responding to that voice. And you might be thinking. What about this Abraham guy?

He was probably a terrific dude. God looked down and he thought. This guy is the best. He's the smartest. He's the most athletic. He has all the giftings.

I'm going to pick the greatest guy that was ever there. And we don't really know much about Abraham. I'm not left with the impression.

We know that from later records. All the mistakes that Abraham makes. He wasn't really a particularly significant person. And I think the point of the text is that Abraham was actually a nobody.

[10:24] He really was no different from other people. We don't know that much about his life. So we can only speculate. But he was really not that important.

God is important. It doesn't say Abraham spoke to God. And God did. No. It was God that spoke to Abraham. God called a nobody to become a somebody. And this nobody would become an instrument in God's hands to change the world.

And it's this Abraham that the three martyrs at Oxford looked back to. It was the faith of Abraham that would be the faith of us all.

That we all are a part of. And that became an instrument to be able to change the world. And to bring the blessings of God to the world. And we see in the Bible so many times that God uses very insignificant people to do very significant things.

We see that with Abraham. With Moses. You know. He couldn't speak properly. What a weird guy to choose to lead a nation. To be a public speaker. A guy that can't speak.

[11:33] David was the youngest. And a shepherd. Rachel was barren. Ruth was a pagan Moabite. Jeremiah was too young. Paul was the chief of sinners. Zacchaeus was a traitor.

I mean talking about like picking the greatest group. You know. To do God's work. You know. It's almost like you pick the worst people. We are in good company. When it comes to God picking insignificant people to do very significant work.

God picks some very strange people to do his work in the Bible. And that's an application here. I'm almost reminded about George Mueller in England. Who built orphanages for so many children.

He once said that we have yet to see in the world. What God can do to a person fully committed to him. And there is a lot of truth in that. That he lived by faith.

He didn't have much funds. But he fed and took care of thousands of thousands of children in England. And this George Mueller was a terrible guy before he converted. He was a wicked person in many ways.

[12:37] Which I'm sure he would acknowledge himself. But God took this wicked man and turned him into an instrument helping children. He lived a selfish life. To live a selfless life for God.

And there's something about that. When we can take that courageous stand. Like Latimer, Ridley, Kramer, George Mueller. And most importantly Abraham.

And we should never underestimate what God can do with that. We might not be called to build orphanages. Or even to do what Abraham did. But we have a calling on our local community.

To take a courageous stand for God. And to follow his word. And we should never underestimate what can come from that. And that brings us to the second point.

God commands Abraham. That is what is commanded. We see that God speaks to Abraham. And here actually is the content of what. What is he telling him?

[13:33] I mean why is it that Abraham leaves everything behind? Did God have a special content for him? Did he have something special to tell him? What did God command Abraham? Go from your kindred.

Your father's house. To the land that I will show you. Give up your culture and your city. Really everything you have. And it's an amazing thing. You know. Here you have a guy. I'm sure he lives in

Mesopotamia.

It's not that living standard of that time. It's most likely a much better place to live. Than a lot of other places. It's a highly family oriented culture. Most likely he will probably take care of his parents. His extended family. At this time. This will most likely be a very developed place. Compared to living in a desert. Or living in other places. I mean you have bigger cities. Will always.

Especially back then. You also might even get protection. You know. There are robbers. And all kinds of dangerous people. That can come to get you. And. He's called to leave all that behind.

[14 : 31] Imagine yourself. You never get to see your family again. Give up your culture. Give up your city. Give up. Whatever you. Whoever you worship. And. And. And. Start from scratch. You know.

You don't even. Probably. Don't get to take any money with you. I mean. What kind of person. Would want to do that? That doesn't sound appealing. Give up your house. Your family. Your culture. Your language.

Everything. And you start from scratch. And you just jump into a desert. And see how that goes for you. It's. It's almost like. It's not rational. It doesn't make any sense.

That anyone would do that. And. And this is. A culture. That's highly. Collective. We don't. This is not an individualistic. Western culture. That no one's going to tell me what to do.

And to think. I'm going to do like. Carve my own path. This is. A collective culture. You don't dishonor your family. You know. You follow. Whatever your father did. Your ancestors did.

[15 : 26] For thousands of generations. This is not. An individualistic culture. Where you just kind of. Follow your own calling. But Abraham does it. He gives up. Security. Comfort. And he becomes.

The exalted father of us all. He had to deny himself. Empty himself. Before he could do this. It's almost like God. Took him. And. Removed. All his idols.

All the security. All the comfort. And he started really. From scratch. And all of this. For a voice. Speaking to him. If you said today.

You know. I'm. Going to move into the desert. Have a voice speaking to me. Probably be put into. A mental institution. But back then. They were. They didn't think. The same way about it.

But there were many gods. You know. Abraham could have picked. A family god. He could have picked. A different god. That. He could stay with his family. So there wasn't. A lack of gods. In this culture.

[16 : 19] There were all kinds of gods. He could pick. A pagan god. And stick with that. Which he probably did. Before he. God called him. But there is. This sense here. That Abraham. Pulls the calling of God.

But also that he. He needs to be emptied. Abraham. Power of Babel. Is a man trying to build up. All these bricks. Do all these things. To achieve righteousness with God. But Abraham.

He needs to. Almost be a blank slate. Before God can start using him. He needs to be completely emptied. Give up all his idols. All the security. All the comfort. And then.

God is going to mold. And shape him from scratch. Just like. Latimer. Ridley. And Cranmer. These people. You know. At this time.

Were very well educated. They had good positions. And. They could live your best life now. If they wanted to. But. They give up their lives. Simply just. For standing.

[17 : 12] For truth. Abraham gave up. A security. A certain future. To walk into the unknown. And this is an important reminder. For us. Security. I think in Norway.

One of the major idols. In Norway. Is security. Being taken care of. And there's nothing. Like wrong. With having security. There's also. Nothing wrong with. Feeling safe. And all these things.

It's only a problem. When these things. Become more important. Than God. God has blessed us. With many good things. In life. But these things. Should never take the place. Of God. When it comes to the point.

Where you have to. Choose between these things. And God. You have to choose God. And this is the thing. With Abraham. He had to give up. This idol. Of being secure. Because God has something.

Greater in store for him. He didn't see it. There was no evidence. Before him. But he trusted God. Despite the evidence. As an application here.

[18 : 08] I think God. To some degree. Has called us all. To give up. Our idols. It could be. Security. Money. It could. Being liked. Pride. You know. It could be. Almost anything. That you can

think about.

We are called. Like Abraham. Maybe not to walk into. The promised land. Or to. To walk into. A wilderness. But we are called. To give up.

The things. That are important to us. And to put God. In the center. Of. Our lives. And let our daily habits. Conform to that. And ultimately. To let Christ.

Be our security. And when we have Christ. As our security. We will ultimately. Have a security. That. Is not impacted. By the circumstances. Whatever we lose.

The good things of life. Can be lost. In seconds. But we will never lose Christ. And when we put our trust. And security in him. We will find. An incredible joy. And I can certainly testify.

[19:07] For my sake. I have not always. Find it easy. To kind of give up. You know. I mentioned earlier. Downstairs. That I was not planning. On doing church planting. But one of the things. In church planting. Is.

And I am not saying. At all. That I have always. Been a good example. Of this. Sometimes I. I lack faith. I complain too much. Sometimes. And. I have. In a lot of ways. We have been a terrible example. In a lot of ways.

There have been people around me. That have been. Very supportive. And encouraging. But one of the things. In church planting. You have to give up. Security. You never know. What is going to happen next. And trust me.

I have. Seen a lot of things. I never thought. I would ever see. Mental kinds of people. That I never thought. I would meet. But it is this idea. You have to live. In the moment. And see kind of.

What God does. And it is a hard way. To live. But. It helps us. To trust Christ. And sometimes. To look at him. And know.

[19:59] That regardless. And even if we fail. Just a fear of failing. For example. Is a big thing. In church planting. If you put all this work. Into something. And suddenly. It just could collapse. Right before your eyes.

I have seen church plants. Collapse. In days. They used. They did very well. And suddenly.

Something happens. And there is no church there anymore. But. And I have seen pastors.

You know. I would never be able to do that. There is one guy. And he is so faithful. He continues.

To preach the gospel. There is practically no people left in his church. Extremely faithful. To God.

Despite what he sees around him. Because God has called him. To preach to those few people. I don't think I will ever be able to do that. But it is so encouraging. To see. That kind of faith.

Just like Abraham had. Abraham gave up everything. To follow God. And that brings us to the third point. And God promises Abraham. There are promises attached.

[20:56] To Abraham. In verse 2. God will make Abraham a great nation. Bless him. And make his name great. And he will be a blessing. Verse 3. Those who bless Abraham. Will be blessed. And those who dishonor him. Will be cursed.

And the families. The ethnos of the earth. Will be blessed. Verse 4. We see that Abraham went with Lot. Abraham was not called.

Without any reason. Abraham was not called. So he could. Have health and wealth. You know. We are going to give you the best life. And Abraham was blessed. In a lot of ways. But at that moment. There was no evidence.

Just like the reformers. The dying. At the stake. In the flames. There was no evidence. At that time.

You know. That you know. Well. He is going to be very blessed. Abraham. I am sure that Abraham. Abraham would not expect us. To be here today. You know. Talking about him. You know.

Thousands of years afterwards. It is. It is an incredible thing. To think about. That this man stepping out.

[21:51] Become an exalted father of us all. Is the reason. Why we are here. And the way that God used him. But Abraham was not blessed. So he could be a blessing to himself. He could live.

A very privileged lifestyle. And he could just kind of. Really live his best life now. That is not why he is being blessed. He is blessed. So he could be a blessing. To other people. The word blessing.

In Hebrew. Is. Barak. Is. Which is actually a very broad word. Sometimes the English. Sometimes. When we think blessing. We think often material blessing. But in Hebrew.

It is much richer than that. The word is. Is much broader. It can mean material blessing. But it also means righteousness. In Psalm 24. Life. Psalm 123. And salvation.

In Psalm 3.8. So it is. Life. Righteousness. Salvation. As well as. As material blessing. It can also mean that. One can include this.

[22 : 48] That the Bible is a book. About relationship to God. And salvation to people. The greatest. And most important blessing. Is to be reconciled to God. And that ultimately. Is the main calling. Of Abraham.

Abraham is blessed. To be a blessing to others. And really to bring. Redemption. To humanity. To his. His bloodline. And eventually. We don't believe in.

In bloodline. In the same way. As Christians today. But Abraham was the forefather. Of. You know. A physical bloodline. But now we have a spiritual. Bloodline. That's all attached. To the cross of Christ. We see the same thing.

With Jacob. And other people. In the Bible. The reason. Why. We are blessed. Is to be a blessing. To other people. It's. To bring people. To God.

Being reconciled to God. Is the main thing. But also to love. Our neighbors. So the main thing. Is. Ultimately. The gospel. At that time. That gospel. Was more concealed.

[23 : 46] But it has been revealed. And opened up. With the new covenant. And to us today. But there is also. A physical. A material blessing.

That comes as a result. Of that. The fall. Damaged. Our relationship. With God. Which is the most important thing. That Christ came to reconcile. But it also damaged.

Everything else. Our. Nature. It damaged. The world. And. After the fall. This. Part of this calling. Is also to restore.

And. And. To fix the damages. That the fall. The fall. The fall created. And. And we see. With the biblical worldview. That's one thing. I've spent. A good amount of time. Studying. Is to really just. To look at. How the bible. Has impacted. Different parts. Of the world. You look. For example. From 1901. To the year 2000. 654 Nobel Prize winners.

[24 : 40] Come from. 28. Different religions. And 65.4%. Identifies with Christianity. Like. A lot of other examples. I could use. But. If you even look at.

Some of the greatest blessings. Everything from medicine. Science. And all the things. That helps us to live. The lives that we are living now. It comes out of a biblical worldview. And there's a lot of evidence for that.

It might be hard sometimes to believe. But it really is a lot of evidence for it. And all of that. Is pointing to the glory of Christ. That is supposed to. It doesn't always do that. But it's supposed to. Let me look at these things. What blessings. It is to live today. With just modern medicine. And we should glorify God. We should come to Christ. As a result of that. For having those blessings. And that is blessings. That should be given to other people. And also with that. Bringing the gospel. To the nations. Bringing the gospel. With words. As well as with deeds.

[25 : 35] But regardless how much we try. We know Abraham. He did some great things for God. But he paled. He almost sells his wife.

Into some sort of prostitution. And he lies. You know. He does some bad things. So he pales. He is not the perfect. Exalted father. For us all. So we might ask the question.

Like what do we do then. Where do we get this strength. To be able. To carry on. And to. To bring this blessing. To other people. I know that. I have not always witnessed. To people.

In a way. That I should. You know. I have not said the right things. I have not acted in the right way. People might look. That he is not a good witness. So we are failing. On a daily basis. To achieve this goal.

Of being. Like. God. And achieving righteousness. And to. Give this to the nations. What was it. That gave. Vladimir Ridley. And Cramner.

[26 : 32] The strength to do this. What was it. That gave Abraham. The strength. To do this. In Hebrews 1. 1. In the past. God spoke to our ancestors. Through the prophets. At many times.

And in various ways. But in. These last days. He has spoken to us. By his son. Whom he appointed. Heir for all things. And through whom. Also he made. The universe. Like Abraham.

Jesus Christ. Gave up his kingship. His heavenly house. And emptied himself. And fully trusted. The father. But unlike Abraham. God the father.

Did have to sacrifice his son. And we remember. The story. With Abraham and Isaac. When Abraham is sacrificing. Isaac at the altar. And in Genesis 22.

2. It says. Do not lay a hand. On this boy. He said. Do not do anything. To him. Now I know. That you fear God. Because you have not. Withhold from you.

[27 : 26] Your only son. So. Abraham actually. Called the place. The Lord will provide. On the mountain. Of the Lord. It will be provided. It says afterwards. Abraham.

Was not perfect. And God asked him. To sacrifice his son. Because sacrifices. Have to be made. For imperfect people. But. Abraham did not have to sacrifice his son. Because already then. God had already promised. To sacrifice. His son. He says. He will provide. He will provide. A better son. A better son. A better son.

A better son. Than Latimer. Ridley. And Cramer. A better son. Than any of the sons. That have ever lived. In human history. And at the moments. When we fail. That's the son.

That we need to put. Our security in. That's the son. That brought. The blessings. Of salvation. To the world. It's that sacrifice. On the cross. That make. Our mission.

[28 : 22] Possible. He was not sacrificed. Well technically speaking. On a mountain. But he was really sacrificed. Before the whole world. Under the open heavens.

Because this salvation. Is for everyone. And it is in Jesus Christ. We need to put. Our faith.

Because contrary. To Babel.

Which was. In a sense. Man's attempt. To achieve righteousness. With God. God's call to Abraham. And ascending Jesus Christ. Was ultimately. God coming down.

And giving us. His righteousness. It is not. What we can do for him. But it's. About accepting. What he can do for us. And at the moments. That we fail.

In this. We cannot rest. In our own ability. In our own promises. But in the promises of God. And in the redemptive blood. Of Jesus Christ. And what he can do.

[29 : 19] So we are. Today. A part of this. Blessing of Abraham. We are called. We are called. To go out. In the nations. Proclaim the gospel. Heal our community. Nations. And.

And it's. For all groups. It's not. A biological thing. It's all. The families. All the ethnos. All the ethnic groups. Of the earth. Spiritually speaking.

We are all reconciled. Through Christ. Regardless. Of the background. That we have. And we have. That calling. To continue. Wherever we are. We not. Might not be called. To be planting churches. Or. To be like Abraham. Or even like the reformers. You know. To be burnt at the stake. But. We have a calling. To be. A father. A mother. To be.

You know. A good worker. And to be in our community. And to bring. The gospel. And. The healing. To. These places. So.

[30 : 14] Wherever we are. Whatever we do. We ought to do it. For the glory of God. And to keep in mind. That he died. For us. Therefore. We ought to go out. And to live. For him. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father. We thank you. For your good gifts. And. We thank you. For Abraham. And the way you used him. And pray that. We will be. Tools in your hands. To bring.

Salvation. And the blessing of Abraham. To. The nations. Locally. In our families. And to other nations. As well. Wherever you have called us to be. That will be faithful.

In the place. That you have called us. Protect us in your blood. And help us to. To do that. Not in our own power. But in yours. In your name. Jesus. Amen. Amen.