

Blessing and Gathering

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Date: 18 June 2017

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, these days we're given all sorts of promises to make life better, from politicians to products. So a recent classic example is this man on the next slide with his promise to make America great again.
- That was his whole campaign. That was his big promise to America. Or take the next slide, the Superstore Walmart. Its slogan is Save Money, Live Better, which assumes that the products they sell don't break and you don't have to buy them a second time, or that money actually brings happiness.
- But one of my favourite ones is on the next slide, which is Change Your Life With Bacon. And the actual TV commercial has the family where life suddenly becomes better by eating bacon.
- It's amazing. You see, there are all sorts of promises out there to make life better, from politicians to products. Which means, by the way, that everyone knows life is not as good as it could be.
- Something has happened. And as we've seen over the past weeks, Genesis 1 to 11 has happened. But today we come to some other promises, this time from God, to make life better.
- [1 : 1 9] And they address what has happened in Genesis 1 to 11. In fact, these promises set God's agenda for the rest of the Old Testament and the New Testament.
- And even beyond to us today, as we look forward to life being made better in the world to come. And so our passage today is a significant turning point, not only for the book of Genesis, but for the whole Bible.
- In fact, you could even say that our passage today is the theological halfway point of the Bible. Because the rest of the Bible, all that bit, is concerned with unpacking these promises here today.
- But to see their significance, we need to firstly remember their context. What's happened so far? Point one in your outline. And this is the last talk in Genesis, which for some of you might be a relief because it's been hard work.
- It actually gets easier after chapter 12. But because it's the last one, we're going to do a fair bit of a recap. And so today's talk will be a bit longer. So let me just get into it. I'm going to try and help keep your attention along the way.
- [2 : 2 5] So the next slide, we started with a good creation in Genesis 2 to 4. And so what was good went bad.
- Blessing turned to curse. Life turned to death. Good turned to bad. Yet in chapter 3, verse 15, you might remember that God promised an offspring of Eve who would crush the serpent's head.
- And in doing so, free people from the curse and bring blessing. Of course, in chapter 4, the first offspring of Eve was Cain.
- Yet he did not crush the serpent's head or rule over sin and death. Instead, Cain was ruled by sin. Do you remember? And he caused death, the death of his brother, Abel.

And so there was more cursing, you might remember, for Cain. Although chapter 4 ended with a sign of grace, the birth of Seth, which means granted, God's grace granted another offspring of Eve.

[3 : 42] And so that was the first account at the top of the slide. And then we move to the next section of Genesis with that new topic sentence. This is the account of Adam's line. And again, there were good signs of life.

Our family line grew in number. People lived a long life. There was long lifespans. And there was many sons and daughters being born. And yet this too went bad.

For life in Adam's image was always ending in death. Do you remember that phrase? And he died. And he died. And he died. And he died. It would almost be comical if it were not so sad.

And this death was a result of sin, which had run rampant. So in the first part of chapter 6, God saw how great humanity's wickedness was. How every inclination of the human heart was only evil all the time.

And so that led to more judgment of death. God shortened lifespans and decided to flood the world. And yet that section also ended with grace. Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

[4 : 47] And so on the next slide, we have the account of Noah. Where God used Noah to save humanity and the animals. While he washed away the wickedness of humanity. And there was fresh start with fresh blessing from God.

And yet this account also went bad. Ending with Noah getting drunk and his son Canaan being cursed. But again, there's a sign of grace.

Because Shem was blessed. There was praise for Shem. And then last week at the bottom of the slide there. We saw chapter 10 begin with humanity increasing in number.

Filling the earth. And it seems like things were back on track. Yet even this seemingly good start was actually bad. For the scattering was a result of sin. Where people no longer wanted to live with God.

And make God's name great. Do you remember? They wanted to live without God. Gather together. Build a tower. And make their name great. And so they were divided by language.

[5 : 48] Which forced them to scatter over the earth. And so we're left with a pretty depressing account. Of the world's beginning. Aren't we? There is no united people of God.

Who live in the perfect place of God. Under the loving rule of God. And enjoying all the blessings of God. Instead we are left with what sounds like our world today. We are left with a divided people of the world.

Who live in a cursed world. Where there is disease and death. And under their own rule. Which does evil as well as good. Do you remember last week? I said humanity can do great good.

We've invented a 3D printer that can print a human heart to save life. But we can also print a gun to take life. It is good and evil. And so people don't enjoy all the blessings of God in this world.

Now I don't know about you. But if I were God at this point. I'd be pretty tempted to give up. I mean time and time again. Good goes bad. Time and time again. You offer grace.

[6 : 49] And humanity messes it up. Time and time again. And the promise of an offspring who might crush the serpent's head. Deal with sin and death. Bring blessing. Will they end up being mastered by sin.

Or succumbing to death. Or bringing cursing. I remember trying to ice skate once. When I was a teenager. I started off quite well.

But I kept falling over. Time and time again. I ended up on my backside. And so after repeatedly wetting my pants. From the ice. To be clear. I decided that ice skating just wasn't for me.

I gave up. And yet God does not. He's determined you see to bless. And so as we come to the next section. Before our reading. The writer hones in on Shem's line.

And signals hope. Have a look just for a minute. At chapter 11 verse 10. What comes straight after the Tower of Babel. Chapter 11 verse 10. This is the account of Shem's family line.

[7 : 50] Two years after the flood. When Shem was 100 years old. He became the father of Afrax. And after he became the father of Afrax. Shem lived 500 years. And had other sons and daughters. And then on it goes.

Now the thing is. The writer has actually already mentioned. Shem's sons before. Chapter 10 verse 21. So why does he list Shem's descendants again?

It seems he wants us to focus now. Not on all of Noah's sons. But on one particular son. Because he knows from Shem's line. The promised offspring or seed of Eve would come.

And as we skim over those verses. From chapter 11 verse 10 to 26. If you just skim over those for a minute. We can notice two things. First.

First. The ages of people are generally declining. Just as God said they would. Our lifespans are getting shorter. As God said in chapter 6. But second. This genealogy is written almost exactly like the one in chapter 5.

[8 : 52] With Adam. And yet there's one big difference. Back in chapter 5. Remember that repeated phrase. And he died. And he died. And he died. It's missing. It's exactly the same.

Apart from different names. And that one phrase. It's as though the writer is signaling hope is on the horizon. And as we trace Shem's genealogy.

It ends on the 10th generation with Abram, Nahor and Harad. And so could hope and the promised seed come through one of these three sons?

It's as though the writer is building the anticipation. It's like being at a cricket match where the crowd starts that slow clap. You know that one? And they get faster and faster and faster as the bowler comes in.

The writer starts to pick up pace as he opens next into the account of terror. And we trace Abram's line to chapter 12, verse 1.

[9 : 51] Where we read, The Lord said to Abram, Go from your country, your people, your father's household to the land I will show you. And after all this going bad and cursing, God says, I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you.

I will make your name great and you'll be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and whoever disdains you, I will curse. And all peoples on the earth will be blessed through you.

After 11 depressing chapters of cursing, here is the breakthrough bowl with blessing. Here is the watershed moment. Here is hope for humanity.

Here is God's gracious and divine intervention. This is what Shem's account and Terah's account were both leading up to. God's promises to Abram.

And now I was trying to think, how can I help you capture the momentous occasion of this? And I was thinking, it's a bit like a piece of music that builds to a big crescendo.

[10 : 54] Take Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture. Have a listen to this on the next slide. A bit more volume. And they've got the cannons going and everything.

Anyway, I kind of related to that. That's what it's like here in Genesis 12. It's this momentous occasion where God promises blessing among other things.

So what are those other things? Well, we're at point two in the outlines, the content of the promises. And it starts with the promise of land. So verse one again, he says, Go from your country to the land I will show you.

Or again, down in verse seven, The Lord appeared to Abram and said, To your offspring or seed, I will give this land. See, God promises to show Abram a land that he will give to his descendants to enjoy.

And God reiterates this promise in chapter 13 and 15 and 17. In other words, God is promising another place for his people to dwell. Where there will be blessing.

[12 : 11] A place like Eden. A place they can call home. That's the first promise. The second promise is there in verse two. He says, I will make you into a great nation.

God promises offspring, many offspring to occupy the land. And again, that promise is reiterated in 13, 15 and chapter 17. In fact, God will even change Abram's name from Abram, which means father, to Abraham, which means father of many nations.

That's how many descendants he's going to have. The third promise is to make Abram's name great. Verse two. Unlike the people of Babel who tried to make their own name great, God will make Abram's name great.

And fourth, God's promised that Abram would be a blessing to others as well. And so those who bless Abram, that is those who align themselves with Abram and his God, will also be blessed.

In fact, all peoples of the earth, including us, will be blessed through Abram. You see, these promises were meant to reverse the effects of the four.

[13 : 21] For God is promising to create another people of God. To live in the perfect place of God. Under the loving rule of God, to enjoy all the blessings of God.

Just like the Garden of Eden. But these blessings would also flow from this nation of Abram, this new people of God, to all peoples in all nations of the world.

And are these not the type of promises that we actually need for a better life? Are these not the type of promises that humanity actually longs for? I mean, do we not long for a people or a community to belong to, a family to be part of, who care about us?

I mean, why is it that solitary confinement is a form of punishment? Is it not because we are wired for relationship with others? Is it not because we're built to belong to a family, to a people?

And do we not also long for a place to call home? I mean, whenever you go away on holiday and then come back home, have you ever felt that sense of, ah, home? You know, that kind of relaxation?

[14 : 30] Until you realize you've got all this washing from your holiday that you need to do. Actually, who am I kidding? Michelle does all our washing. But I feel for her. Yeah, it's like...

I'm going to get in trouble for that one, aren't I? But the point is, we are also wired for a place to call home, a land to rest in, if you like. In the words of Dorothy from Wizard of Oz, there is no place like home.

And do we not long also for a life with blessing rather than cursing, a life where things actually always go well, where our lives prosper and they're not ruined by other people's selfishness or by decay or disease or death?

Isn't that what humanity longs for as well? You see, these promises of God here are not only promises to restore Eden, they're actually the type of promises that humanity longs for, to have a better life.

They are the type of promises that people of Babel tried to accomplish for themselves, but could not. But God says, I will do it.

[15 : 39] You notice the repetition of I will in these verses? I will. I will. Four times. I will. God will do it all. And to make the point clear, he chooses Abram who didn't even worship him.

Noah worshipped God, but Abram didn't even worship God to start with. He was worshipping other gods in the land of Ur of the Chaldeans. What's more, his wife Sarah, we're told in chapter 11 verse 30, is barren.

She could not have any children. And yet what is the one thing you need to become a great nation? At least one child. You see, God chooses Abram and Sarah to show that what will come through them can only be from him.

In fact, we'll hear in a moment that the land God promises to give is already occupied. In other words, God promises seem to be impossible to us. But he does that deliberately so that when it happens, it'll be clear that it's all from him.

So how will Abram respond to these big promises? Well, point three, verse four. So Abram went as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him.

[16 : 55] Abram was 75 years old when he set out from Haran. He took his wife, Sarai, his nephew, Lot, and 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.

Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moriah at Shechem. And at that time, the Canaanites were in the land. The Lord appeared to Abram and said, To your offspring I will give this land.

And so Abram built an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to him. What does Abram do? How does he respond? He trusts in the promises, so much so that he obeys.

He goes. When his father dies at the end of chapter 11, he doesn't go back home to Ur of the Chaldeans, to his extended family. No, he obeys and continues on to this country, this place that God will show him.

He doesn't even know where he's going. It's extraordinary, really. I mean, if you go on holidays to a new place, what do you do? You do your research, don't you? You find out how much it will cost.

[18 : 00] You'll find out what the location is like, what there is to do around there, how many stars the accommodation is. And importantly for us who have children, doesn't have a kids program that will entertain them.

How much more would you check out a place if you were moving there permanently? And yet Abram does not ask for a prospectus or a brochure. Or he simply trusts God and goes.

And he keeps going until verse 7, God says, stop to this place. I'll give to your offspring. And again, notice verse 6, the land is already occupied by the Canaanites.

And if it was me, I'd be thinking, oh God, I'm not so sure about this. I saw a really nice and empty place back there. But Abram does none of that.

Instead, he trusts God's promise so much so that he goes and then he builds an altar to God in worship. It's as though he says, thank you so much, God. My descendants are going to love this place.

[19 : 00] And then from there, he continues to travel throughout the land as though he's kind of staking it out. So verse 8, from there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east.

And there he built another altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord. Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev. I mean, if you're out shopping and you want to have lunch at one of those food courts and you want to get a table, you often put your shopping on the table to claim it, don't you?

And it seems by building another altar in another part of the land, it's like Abram is claiming this land for God. In other words, he trusted God's promise so much so that he claims it as God's land to them, to his descendants.

And again, we see a bit of a little reversal of Babel. Last week, we saw people disobey God when it came to filling the earth. Instead, they grouped together and built a tower to make their name great.

But here's Abram who obeys God and moves throughout the land, kind of symbolically filling it and then builds not a tower for his name, but two altars to God's name.

[20 : 13] And he calls on the name of the Lord. It's a complete opposite, isn't it? But the point is, Abram believes God's promises. He trusts in them, has faith in them, so much so that he obeys God's word, even though he has no children, even though there are already people in the land, he trusts and worships God.

A while ago, I promised my children that if they did some jobs, they could have some lollies. And one of them responded by saying, show us you've got the lollies first.

I didn't believe I would deliver on my promise. But Abram is promised something much bigger than lollies, isn't he? And it required him to leave his country, his extended family, go to a place he's never seen, and yet he believes, he trusts.

When my kids responded to my promise like that, I was tempted to eat all the lollies myself in front of them. Though one child did say, oh, dad always keeps his promises, which I thought was nice, so I gave him all the lollies.

But God also keeps his promises too, which brings us to point four. See, God does make Abram's name great. I mean, did you realize that over 50% of the world's population claim some link to Abraham?

[21 : 29] Do you realize that? As of 2002, the most recent stats I could get, 2.2 billion Christians. We're still the biggest religion in the world. 1.6 billion Muslims.

They have a connection with Abraham. And 13.5 million Jews. That's over 50% of the world's population know of Abraham as someone significant.

And that's having a name made great, is it not? That promise, which was to Abraham alone, has been fulfilled. And the other three promises of people, place, and blessing, or if you want another acronym to help you remember, land, offspring, blessing, so the tennis shot LOB, you know, L-O-B, land, offspring, blessing, well, they are traced throughout the rest of the Bible, and they are firstly fulfilled in Israel.

So God does give Abraham's descendant the land of Israel, which was called the promised land because of this promise. It was also called a land flowing with milk and honey, a land of rest.

In other words, it was a place like Eden. And under David and Solomon, there was great rest and prosperity in the land. And offspring, well, again, this is fulfilled in Israel, who under David and Solomon grew to the greatest nation on earth.

[22 : 49] And blessing, well, again, firstly fulfilled in Israel, because under David and Solomon, they enjoyed peace and prosperity like no other. In fact, on the next slide, we read that the king Solomon made silver as common as stone in Jerusalem.

Can you imagine that? There is so much silver, the country is so rich, that it's as common as stone on the street. And what's more, they became a blessing to the nations as people from the nations joined Israel and so benefited from their blessings.

And so to kind of represent this pictorially, on the next slide, God started with a promise to Abram. And then on the next slide, God grew Abram into God's people, Israel.

And then on the next slide, God gave them the land of Israel and under David and Solomon, they enjoyed God's blessings. This was the pinnacle. And what happened was on the next slide, people even joined them, the black dots are those from the nations joining in and receiving blessing too.

And yet, even that good went bad. For Israel sinned and so rebelled against God again and again and again. And in doing so, brought cursing upon themselves.

[24 : 04] And so faithful Israel on the next slide reduces to a small, small remnant or group. And yet God is still determined to bless. And so there is another gracious divine intervention.

God the Son comes to earth, born in the line of Abram. In other words, Jesus is the seed of Eve, of Shem, of Abram, who inherits these promises of God.

So on the next slide, from Galatians 3, which is our second reading, it says, the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed, his offspring. As scripture does not say, and to seeds, meaning many people, but and to your seed, meaning one person who is Christ.

You see, Jesus is the seed of Abram who inherits the promises. So if we click on the next slide, the promises made to Abram spread to include the nation of Israel, but because of their sin, they kept losing the promises and it filters down to the one man, Jesus.

And because Jesus did not sin, he did not lose the promises, nor did he keep them for himself. Instead, he died on the cross to pay for our sin, to crush the serpent's head.

[25 : 17] Satan has lost his power over us. He cannot demand our death anymore. Instead, we can be forgiven and have life eternal. And what's more, by trusting or having faith in Christ, we are united to Christ.

We get to join God's people and become part of Abram's family or seed. So on the next slide, we've heard this from our second reading. Understand then that those who have faith are children of Abraham.

As Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith and announce the gospel in advance to Abraham, all nations will be blessed through you. So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham.

Paul continues on the next slide but by saying Christ redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham in chapter 12 might come to us Gentiles through Christ Jesus by being united to Christ.

And so he says, so in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith and if you belong to Christ then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.

[26 : 24] you see by being united to Christ the seed the seed we too become part of Abraham's seed or offspring and so the promises come to us.

So on the next slide just to go back to our diagram there is the promise God made to Abraham which filters down to Jesus and then if you click next we join Christ we are in Christ united to Christ and so the blessings promised come to us as well.

In fact because we are in Christ we cannot lose the promises they depend on him not us we just simply ride his coattails so to speak if of course we trust in him and so the first question for us this morning is do we trust in Christ?

If you want to receive these promises from God then we're to trust in Christ become part of Abraham's family his seed. As I said before these are the promises humanity still longs for.

It's why we work hard in the fields of science and technology and medicine to make life better. It's why we have organisations like the UN and Make Poverty History to make life better. It's what stands behind our songs like John Lennon's Imagine All the People Living Life in Peace and yet it isn't like that and no matter how hard humanity tries sin means our world will always look alarmingly like Genesis 3 to 11 but in Christ we can receive God's promises of blessing of land of a new place to look forward to of being part of his family of receiving blessing we can be part of God's people now part of a community who cares for one another with every spiritual blessing now including forgiveness our heavenly father who will never leave us nor forsake us the Holy Spirit who will help us grace given to us in our time of need just to name a few and what's more we can have a place to call home in heaven later we will also receive every physical blessing no more decay or disease or death just prosperity health and life we can have these promises if we trust in Christ and so do you for us who do then firstly do we thank God for his gracious and divine intervention in Christ and for his determination to bless us even though we don't deserve it do we thank him that he has already kept his promises to Israel and has kept some of them already in Christ and so we have every reason to trust him to keep his promises to us in the future do we thank God and secondly do we trust God do we keep trusting in him do we keep clinging to Christ and God's promises in him you see we had to be like

[29 : 25] Abram who trusted God's promises and worshipped him even though he had no children even though he was going to a land that was occupied by others even though he couldn't see what God was doing in life I mean he had to wait 25 years before he had a child and it's like that for us we live in a land that is occupied by others who are not God's people there will be times in life when we're not sure what God is doing but we have to trust in God's promises that we need to make sure we know what those promises are what he promises and what he does not promise but we have to make sure we keep trusting in the promises he does give let me finish with a story about a lady from an old church so on the last slide meet June Perry she was a lady who used to play the organ at my old church and she loved doing it but she never had much she never had a husband even though she would have loved to have been married she didn't have many clothes in fact that blue parka I think I was there for four and a half years or five years and I saw that on her every week and every time I visited her she didn't have many clothes and she didn't have a fancy house she had a very small house it was more like an apartment it was very old it still had the toilet out the back which kind of seems boggling to us these days and then she got arthritis in her fingers which meant she couldn't play the organ which she loved and when I visited her she was telling me about her life and she said

Andrew I know some people think I don't have much but they keep forgetting that I have a really fancy home in heaven and hopefully an organ too you see she trusted in God's promise and lived in light of it so much so that she was content with what she had it gave her perspective you see and it helped her to keep trusting Christ may we do the same let's pray gracious father we do thank you for this series through the beginning of Genesis which reminds us of our beginning in this world but it also reminds us of who you are that you are a God who is determined to bless that a God who is continually gracious and most of all in giving your son so that we who trust in him can inherit these promises made to Abram and so be part of your people now with every spiritual blessing and look forward to a home in heaven with every physical blessing and till that day father we pray that you would help us to be like Abram to be like June and to continue trusting in your promises for we ask it in Jesus name

Amen and I see you■ and thank you for that for may ■■