

Genesis 12

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[0 : 00] I believe this morning that our music ministers are to be greatly commended! I saw some Presbyterians today maxing out their category, so that was something tremendous.

! In today's passage, I invite you to turn with me to Genesis chapter 12. If you don't have a Bible with you today, there are some on the back table there.

The table that Matt already mentioned about next steps. There are Bibles there for you. In today's passage, we're going to be introduced to Abram.

He will soon be renamed Abraham. He was the great patriarch, the father of the nation of Israel. Now, I grew up in a church that sometimes sang in the children's ministry, Father Abraham had many sons.

I don't know if you guys sang that, if you grew up in the church. You know, Father Abraham had many sons, many sons had. Father Abraham, I am one of them, and so are you. So let's all praise the Lord. Right arm, left arm, turn around.

[1 : 14] Yeah, yeah. He knew. He knew. I didn't really understand that song. Because I, as far as I knew, didn't have a drop of Jewish blood.

And so that didn't really mean anything to me. And I was greatly confused about that. But as it turns out, that's not what makes somebody a son of Abraham or not.

It wasn't until years later when I really began reading scripture for myself and saw, in Galatians chapter 3, what makes someone a son of Abraham.

In Galatians chapter 3, starting in verse 7, the apostle Paul writes, Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the scripture foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles, that's everybody who's not a Jew by birth, that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, In you shall all the nations, all the nations be blessed.

So then those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. And so if you are a person of faith, if you've abandoned hope in the things of this world and placed your hope in Christ exclusively, the merits of his death in your place, and his resurrection for your life, you too, I am a son of Abraham.

[2 : 53] And so I can sing that silly song, and it can be about me. We are blessed with the same blessings that Abraham is here promised today in this passage.

And what's more, God patterns your story, my story, after Abraham's story. As we walk through this passage today, you're going to see your story spelled out.

And God will speak to you through his word. You will be built up. You will be challenged. And I think that you'll be comforted.

And where we will end up, we will end up where Abraham ends up at the end of this passage.

We're only reading nine verses. He ends up in worship. And that is where we, friends, are to end up as well.

So today, let's walk alongside Abraham. As he, in this passage, is called to walk before the Lord in faith. So let's begin with prayer. Father, when I last stood in this pulpit two weeks ago, we saw Adam and Eve, and we asked in chapter three, where are their eyes set?

[4 : 20] And then, where are our eyes? Lord, my eyes are tempted to be elsewhere today.

And I'm certain that there are others here who have a lot of life going on right now and are having trouble with eyes set on you.

So, Lord, we ask that you would guide us this morning and all of life to follow after Abraham in faith as he wandered and as we sometimes wander through life, set our eyes on you.

in these quiet moments, in your word, and in all of life. We pray that in Christ's name. Amen. Our passage begins today in verse one.

Now, the Lord said to Abram, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land I will show you. Now, it's easy when it's condensed down so short like that to not recognize just how big that statement is.

[5 : 51] When we read it, what should we be thinking? What should we be seeing? I think the first thing that we should feel here is a sense of loss.

This is no small matter, is it? Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to a land that I will show you.

What God is doing here is he's telling Abraham up front, I'm going to count the cost for you. And it is a big cost, isn't it?

Go from your country. Everything familiar. It's going away. Right? Not just the scenery, but the customs, the language, the values, the identity.

You're going to be a refugee, Abraham. Go from your country and from your kindred. You're going to lose people who are precious to you.

[6 : 58] You're going to miss them. You will not see them again. Not only that, but going forward, you're not going to have the support network that you have leaned on your whole life.

Some of you already are probably beginning to feel a kinship with Abraham. Abraham. Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house.

He saves the deepest hit for last. This is the one that hits closest to home because this is home, isn't it? Abraham, say goodbye to your nearest, your dearest, your closest comfort, your inheritance.

presence. Now, Abraham, you've learned to love these things for 75 years. And after a lifetime of growing to love and depend on them, follow me somewhere else.

Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. See, Abraham, you don't know how this story will end.

[8 : 15] Just like we today do not know how our story will end. The Lord says, I'm not commanding you to know the future, I'm commanding you to walk in faith.

Have you ever been settled, established, comfortable, secure? and then the Lord in his providence moved you?

I think every single person here today and every single person outside those doors today has felt this, right?

There's not a person in the world who hasn't had something important dislodged in their life. I mean, that's why, you know, from the very beginning, that's why our babies cry, right?

From the very first day. There's not a person in the world who hasn't lost the familiar, who hasn't lost something or someone they depended on or got strength from, whom they loved.

[9 : 25] There's a person in the world who hasn't longed for a home that's more sure, more grounded, more secure. Everyone is a wanderer of some kind or another.

Everyone. And so the question is, as a wanderer, are you also lost? in the first book of the Lord of the Rings trilogy, we're introduced to a character, a mysterious sort.

His name is Strider. He's something of an enigma. He is always on the outskirts of civilization. He's always wandering around. And he's quiet. He's an outsider. And for many, many years, he's been apart from civilization, really, and a wanderer.

As the story unfolds, we come to find out that this Strider is actually Aragorn, the son of the kings. He has a home waiting for him. He has a destiny to bless the world.

And during his wandering days, when he's without a crown, without a family, without a home, there's a poem that's written about him. It didn't look impressive, but someone looked beneath the surface a little.

[10 : 42] All that is gold does not glitter. Not all those who wander are lost. The old that is strong does not wither. Deep roots are not reached by the frost.

And that line, not all those who wander are lost, is true of Abraham in this passage. And friends, it can be true of you today.

You see, the Lord calls Abraham to wander. He lives to his dying day. to his dying day in a land that he has promised but never possesses.

Not for a moment possesses. To the whole world, it looks like he is wandering and lost.

Not just separated, but completely without runner. He's a man without a home, without a country, without any stability, but he wanders and he is not lost.

[11 : 46] Why? He is a foreigner, but he has a home. He has no stability, but he is seated on the rock.

Because God is with him. And that's where his eyes are looking. And that's not just for Abram. Remember that those who trust in Christ are the sons of Abraham.

He called here in Genesis 12 Abram to follow him. That's how he called his apostles. Jesus said, follow me and I will make you fishers of men.

And he calls you and I to follow him as well. The apostle Peter puts it in 1 Peter chapter 2. He says, to this you have been called. Because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you might follow in his steps.

And as you follow the Lord, you will feel uprooted. Guaranteed. You might be torn from the places or the habits or the people you love.

[13 : 07] I have lost friends because of my faith. I'm sure many of you have as well. And, you know, God didn't call you the same way he called Abraham.

But every place he has you in his life is something that he has called you to. Because he is the Lord of all the universe.

His will superintends everything. And so the rise and fall of nations and the movement of subatomic particles are all governed by him.

That includes the circumstances of your life to which you are called. So do not fear. When Jesus asked those what did Jesus ask of those who were worried?

What did he say? He said, are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your father.

[14 : 08] But even the hairs of your head are numbered. Quite easy in my case. Fear not therefore. You are of more value than many sparrows.

And so in a way the Lord is saying to you, go to the land that I will show you. When he called us out of sin and darkness, we didn't know where the journey of faith would take us.

We still don't. But it's worth the risk. It is worth the risk. And how do I know that? After the rich young ruler, first off, we can just look at Abraham story and know that it is worth it.

Here's another example. The rich young ruler, when he decided that following Jesus was too costly, how did the disciples respond? Peter said in reply, this is Matthew 19, see, Lord, we have left everything and followed you.

Doesn't that sound a lot like the call to Abraham? We have left everything and followed you. what then will we have? Jesus said to them, truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

[15 : 38] And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands and, oh, does that sound like go from your country and your kindred in your father's house.

Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or land for my name's sake will receive a hundred fold, by which he means the church, and will inherit eternal life. the blessings of faith in our God are infinitely greater than the troubles of our wanderings. That's why the Lord continues in his promise to Abraham in verses two and three and says, and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you, I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. As we pointed out earlier, isn't it interesting that the Lord says, I will bless you and make your name great, in contrast to what we saw in chapter 11, those who built the tower of Babel.

We don't even know their names, do we? they didn't end up making their names great, did they? They said, come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves.

[17 : 28] We don't know them, we don't know their names, we only know their pride and their failure. God said, I will bless you and make your name great.

And thousands of years later, his name is still great. And so, I have to ask, is personal greatness your goal? However you would define that for yourself.

Let me tell you, it's not going to work out for you. First, let's remember, personal greatness is what Adam and Eve were after in chapter 3, isn't it?

The woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was desired to make one wise. She was looking at the promise the serpent gave her, you will be like God.

She took of its fruit and ate and she also gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate. And how did that work out for them? Seeking after personal greatness, they wanted to be like God. [18:36] You really can't top that in terms of trying to aspire to personal greatness, right? There's no upper echelon beyond that. But by serving self, they lost God.

Second, even if you do beat the odds and leave your mark on the world and get your 15 minutes, it will be just that.

15 minutes will end. And even if you leave your mark on the world, you will leave the world. What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?

What does it look like to have a lasting greatness like Abraham? It means to live a life that the Lord thinks is great.

Jesus called his disciples and said, you know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and their great ones exercise authority over them.

[19:46] It should not be so among you, but whoever would be great among you must be your servant and whoever would be first among you must be your slave.

Even as the son of man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. Do you know what advice is commonly given to new preachers?

It's given, it was first given in the 1700s, it goes something like this, preach the gospel, die, be forgotten.

friends, that's greatness. If I make my name great instead of Christ's, then I have utterly failed.

And this can be transposed into every walk of life, can't it? Raise your children faithfully as unto the Lord. Die, be forgotten.

[21:00] That's greatness. Serve your country faithfully as unto the Lord. Die, and be forgotten.

That is greatness. Build a submarine, man a cash register, serve and teach students in love towards God, and to those you serve, die, be forgotten.

your name will be great in heaven. That's how God makes our name great. Found in him, your name is great.

And apart from him, your name will not be. But found in him, your name will be found in the book of life. Built on yourself, your name will fade with your last breath.

Won't it? Now, why? Why is God concerned with making Abraham's name great? Why does he care?

[22:13] Why does he give his people the opportunity to be great servants? Why? Well, he tells us here, I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing.

Now, we have to ask how Abraham a blessing? And not just any blessing. Verse 3 says he will be a blessing to all the families of the earth. That's a tall order.

How was Abraham a blessing to the entire human race? He didn't invent something that changed the world. He didn't write a philosophical masterpiece that changed people's minds.

He didn't build a wonder of the world, but he did bless the whole world. How? If we look at the first sentence of the Gospel of Matthew, we'll see how he blessed the world.

The Gospel of Matthew begins like this. The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Two weeks ago, we saw in chapter 3 that the Lord promised a rescue when our first parents turned on him and earned death and hell and separation for themselves.

[23:46] That promise was found in the curse to the serpent, the deceiver, when he said, I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring.

He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. You see, the enemy was to be defeated by one of Eve's descendants, and that line runs through Abraham, and this blessing is God pulling him apart from the world, setting him aside and saying, this is the line.

I will bless the whole world by sending my son through this line. I'm sending my son, the promised one, to be God with us, who would one day bear the guilt of every sin and make an end of it on his cross, so that everyone who followed Abraham in faith, might be reconciled to God.

In you, he said, all the families of the earth shall be blessed. The blessing was God himself with us, for us.

And I want you to consider with me just how incredible this blessing is. See, does Abraham deserve a blessing from the Lord? Is he somehow special?

[25 : 18] does God owe him a great name? The answer is certainly no. Several hundred years after this event, Abraham's descendants take this land.

They finally take possession of the land that Abraham has here promised. Joshua, who was leading them at the time, explained just how unworthy Abraham was of this promise.

In Joshua 24, we read, Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel. And they presented themselves before God.

And Joshua said to all the people, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, long ago your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and Nahor, and they served other gods.

And then I took your father, Abraham, from beyond the river and led him through all the land of Canaan and made his offspring many. Did you catch that? He served other gods.

[26 : 31] See, the Lord didn't choose Abraham because Abraham was so good. The Lord chose him because the Lord is so good. Abraham was an idolater moving away from God by nature at odds with him, at enmity with him.

The Lord who is good chose to bless someone who did not deserve God. And friends, is that not our story? It is our story if we belong to Christ.

It's incredible how parallel Abraham's story here runs to our salvation. Let me just parallel this passage with how Paul, the apostle, describes our salvation in Ephesians chapter 2.

first, we are both unworthy sinners. We just saw in Joshua how Abraham was an unworthy idolater, actively pursuing his sin, actively pursuing other gods, back turned to the Lord, walking away from him.

And before we came to Christ, that is exactly what the Bible says about us. Ephesians 2 begins, you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of the world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived, in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

[28 : 15] See, we were all in the same boat as Abram, the idolater. And some here, if you want to make any assumptions, some here might still be there, following the course of this world and the passions of the sinful nature, apart from Christ.

And I must warn you that the Bible calls you here, by nature, children of wrath. So turn to Christ today, so that the rest of this story might be true of you.

Because then, in Abram's story and in ours, God reaches out. God went to Abraham and called him to follow him. He brought the blessing to Abraham.

And that's exactly what the Bible says about those who were once dead to sin but are now in Christ. Ephesians 2 continues, but God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, just like Abraham was, made us alive together with Christ.

He brought the blessing. By grace you have been saved and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Jesus. Then, God calls Abraham to walk by faith.

[29 : 49] Follow after me, even if you don't see my full purposes, he's saying, and receive a blessing. It's exactly what we are called to as well. It's mirrored in our story.

Ephesians 2 continues, so that, right, he raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. And finally, he tells Abraham, I am blessing you so that you might be a blessing.

I will bless you, make your name great so that you will be a blessing. And our call still follows his call. Paul concludes this section of Ephesians 2 like this, for by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast, for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.

To be a blessing, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in us, excuse me, that we should walk in them. And so, we who trust in Christ are the sons of Abraham.

[31 : 19] And Christ patterns our story after his. Like Abraham, we were sinners, unworthy of the Lord's blessing. And like Abraham, the Lord came to us and offered us blessing.

blessing. And like Abraham, the Lord calls us to walk in faith in a future promise. And like Abraham, the Lord blesses us so that we will be a blessing.

And so, the remainder of the passage, verses 4 through 9, simply show us what a response to God's call and his grace look like. Read with me, starting in verse 4.

For so Abraham went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was 75 years old when he departed from Haran. And Abram took Sarai, his 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 go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak tree of Morah.

[32 : 33] At that time, the Canaanites were in the land. I love it when another passage of Scripture explains the passage of Scripture that I'm preaching from, because then there's no guesswork.

Hebrews 11. is often called the Hall of Faith. Great heroes of the faith are shown. And Abraham, particularly this moment, is explained to us.

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

By faith, he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents, not houses, 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. God. See, when the Lord calls us to himself, we don't know the whole Bible.

[33 : 50] We can't. And so we don't fully know what it looks like to walk in faith, to be a Christian. We can't know that up front. But he calls us to trust him and walk in faith.

Maybe we've seen someone else do it from a distance, but that doesn't mean we know what it means to follow him, really ourselves. We don't really know yet what it looks like to choose Christ over self all the days of our lives.

What it means to become a servant. What it means to put sin to death. And that's what it means when we read, he went out, not knowing where he was going.

And the second thing that we see in Hebrews as we're taught what to expect from this, is that moment in verse 10.

He was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. You see, the promised land pointed to something from the very beginning.

[34 : 57] That was Abraham's heart. That was his understanding in even this first moment. As he walked, he was looking to something greater.

He was looking to heaven. our passage today concludes in verses seven through nine.

Then the Lord appeared to Abraham and said, to your offspring, I will give this land. So he built there an altar to the Lord who had appeared to him.

From there, he moved to the hill country on the east 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 towards the Naga. As we see what his walk of faith looks like here, there are a number of things that we could draw from it.

[35 : 59] We could point out that Abraham still doesn't really understand what the blessing was to be until after he obeys. He's not explained what the promise of blessing is until after he arrives.

And, you know, from there we might ask, well, how often have you been asked by the Lord to walk through a challenge or a difficult season and only realized long afterwards what the Lord was doing, what he was up to?

And what might that mean about the challenge and the struggle that you're going through today? Maybe this is one of those moments where you do not see yet the Lord is up to.

Until long afterwards. Or we could point out that Abraham is surveying a land that he has been promised but doesn't yet own. Those three places, Shechem, Bethel, Ai, it's essentially a north south journey in the land of Israel that surveys basically the whole land.

And from there we might remember that we too live in an in-between moment, right? We have God's promises for our future but we are, we haven't inherited them yet.

[37 : 18] There is coming a day when he will wipe every tear from every eye. He will bring his justice to the world. He will free us from our remaining struggle with sin.

We will dwell face to face with him. But not today, not yet. But we can follow as Abraham, as he lived in the promises that the Lord had not yet brought to fruition.

So we could think about what it means to look like to live on promise. But where I want our hearts to rest is actually where we begin, where we began this morning.

We could consider walking by faith, not serving our own name, so many things. But this is where I want our hearts to land and it is on worship. See, we've already seen today how everyone is a wanderer of one kind or another.

Sojourners in a land that is not our own. And so, when the Lord directs our paths in difficult directions, far from the comfort and safety and companionship that we are used to or that we desire, we become unmoored, don't we?

[38 : 39] And we're mourning oftentimes. And that might make us anxious. It might make us tired. It might make us depressed.

It might make us angry. There are so many different things that that can kindle in our hearts. And we might cope in all sorts of different ways with food or drink or sex or achievement or the need to control.

There are all sorts of different responses to the wandering that we find in our lives. Or, we could follow Abraham. Two weeks ago, we looked at Genesis 3 and asked, where are your eyes?

Where are your eyes when you're considering sin? Where are your eyes when you are considering a decision? Where are your eyes when you are hurting? Well, where are Abraham's eyes as he wanders and lives in the midst of an unfulfilled promise?

They are fixed on God. In a hostile land, actually points out that the Canaanites were in the land, in a hostile land far from everything familiar, in his old age, with no reasonable path forward to actually taking possession of the blessings he's been promised.

[40 : 05] He builds not one, but two altars for worship. Friends, we are wanderers in this world.

Because this is not our home. You know, they say, home is where the heart is. And Christ told us that the heart is where our treasure is.

So, in some sense, home is where our treasure is. And we treasure Christ. That's what it means to be a Christian. He is the blessing.

Literally, he is the blessing that is promised in this passage. In you, all the families of the world will be blessed. That blessing is Christ.

He is goodness. He is beauty. He is victory. And so, when we are unmoored in our lives, we can choose to cope with all sorts of things.

[41 : 17] Or, we can walk in faith, like Abraham. Set our eyes on Christ. If you follow Hebrews chapter 11 to its conclusion in chapter 12, we see by faith, by faith, by faith, all of these great saints walked by faith.

What, then, are we to do with it? What are we to do with that example?

The first verse of chapter 12 tells us, Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, of whom Abraham is one, let us lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Friends, when the Lord sets us to wandering, when we are unmoored, where will our eyes go? Abraham's eyes were set on Christ, on the Lord. And he, in faith, worshipped the king.

[42 : 54] You and I are the beneficiaries of the promise of this passage, the promise that was given to Abraham. Christ has come and shed his blood for us so that we might be forgiven our sins and adopted into God's family.

Let's praise the name of Jesus. Let's pray. Lord, thank you that we have, in the midst of difficult struggles, struggles.

An advocate in heaven who was promised to Abraham long ago and has come for us. Who has blessed us when, like Abraham, we did not deserve blessing and has called us to be a blessing. Lord, help us to turn our eyes to Christ in worship instead of to our troubles so that we might continue to be blessed day by day and that you might continue to be glorified in us as we bless to be a blessing.

Pray that in the name of Jesus Christ, our King. Amen. Amen.