

# Palm Sunday: Genesis 11:10-12:3

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, this morning we conclude over three months of study on Genesis 1 to 11. We began in the beginning, where the good creator, the Lord God, formed, filled, and blessed what he had made.

And we continued seeing that the people who were made in his image were given life and place and purpose, but instead they chose ambition and sin and death. Humanity challenged God's commands. They subverted his intentions. They hindered blessing and multiplied death. Adam and Eve ate.

Cain killed. Noah's generation poisoned the earth. Babel built an opposition government against God. But as sin spread, God kept pace.

He gave judgment and mercy step for step. For each point of our rebellion, God had a counterpoint. He limits sin and seeks blessing all through the first 11 chapters of Genesis.

[ 1 : 08 ] And it's the same story as we flip the page over to Genesis 12. God's intentions remain. Even though the style shifts, God's vision to bless humanity is the same.

Even as he, in this chapter, will unveil a new strategic phase of his mission of blessing. Now he's going to bless all people through one faithful family.

Okay, so we're going to look at it in three points today. The first point is Shem. Shem, who we read about. The second point is sent. And the third point is salvation.

So let's start with Shem. Shem. Noah had three sons. You remember this from chapter 10. Noah had three sons. Shem, Ham, and Japheth. And in that chapter, all of their descendants began to repopulate and spread over the earth.

But Shem is the one that we need to keep our eyes on. Shem is the Hebrew word for name. In Babel, humanity said, we will make a Shem.

[ 2 : 09 ] We will make a name for ourselves. But now we're going to see God's counterpoint. He will give a Shem. He'll give a name to his chosen family. The giving of God's Shem picks up immediately following Babel.

So the genealogy we read about today in chapter 11, verse 10, that's where we pick up with Shem. But if you're a careful reader of genealogies, I don't know if any of you would classify yourself as careful readers of genealogies.

But over in chapter 10, that genealogy, it follows the line of Shem. And it mentions Peleg. But then it follows the line of Jokton.

It goes down that branch of the genealogy. But here in chapter 11, we go a different direction. So this time, in chapter 11, it follows a different branch than it followed in chapter 10.

Peleg, son of Eber, is the key. He's in verse 17. So in chapter 10, none of Peleg's descendants are mentioned. He's just kind of mentioned offhand. But in chapter 11, only Peleg's descendants are mentioned.

[ 3 : 12 ] So what's happening is that the genealogy in chapter 10 is widening and filling. All of the sons are named. No years are given.

There's just this expansive sense to it. Lots of places, lots of people. It's going across the face of the earth. But the genealogy in chapter 11 is exactly the opposite. It spotlights. It zooms in.

It follows one particular line. One particular line within Shem's descendants. It's a narrowing of people. Only the firstborn is named for nine generations.

Each one carrying the line down like a monarchy. It's a narrowing of time. Each generation, their years shorten. Their lives shorten. And we move from this really generous kind of expansive sense of history into the immediate present.

And it's a narrowing of place. This family doesn't spread out like all the other families. They stay in Ur of the Chaldeans, which is actually the heart of Babylon.

[ 4 : 12 ] Because it turns out that God will launch his great name project right from the ashes of Babel's great name project. And he'll do it by choosing just one family for his purpose to bless all of humanity.

So you see that in the genealogy. One heir is named per generation. All the way down it goes. Down, down, down. This guy, this guy, this guy. All the way down to Terah, verse 26. And from Terah's three sons, God chooses one son, Abram.

And then Abram becomes a couple when he marries Sarai in verse 29. And then we get to the surprise in verse 30. Now Sarai was barren and she had no child.

This is a shocking setup to Genesis chapter 12. That verse, verse 30. Because the idea of blessing and Genesis is all about abundant life.

Right in the beginning, God blesses the birds and the fish and he blesses people. And he blesses them to team and multiply and be abundant on the face of the earth. God blesses the Sabbath vertically to rest and celebrate life in him, abundant life in the creator.

[ 5 : 24 ] But now, God chooses, God stakes this entire project he's building on one couple who cannot have kids. They're not blessed with multiplying.

He stakes it on a family of pagans from Babylon. For Abram's families, they worshiped the moon god. They weren't blessed with the Sabbath. Everything we expect is flipped upside down right here in Genesis 11.

And this is also integral to God's strategy. Not only is God going to build a name from one family, he is going to build his name out of the most impossible, improbable circumstances you can imagine. That's an amazing principle, I think, to take for just a second. That as God's family, we're invited to judge reality backwards.

Not by what's possible, but by what's impossible. Because when you look at God's plan, that's how it works. In God's plan, the childless conceive. Only in God's plan does Joshua take Jericho and David beat Goliath.

[ 6 : 36 ] Only in God's plan does a virgin give birth. Does God's son die and be resurrected? And then an empire overturned by a story.

The name God builds, the name he intends to build through Shem, through this line, is a name that only he can build. That's Shem, the name that God makes.

So let's look at how God's Shem is sent. And this is chapter 12. 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.

The Lord speaks to Abram, launching this impossible mission, and he says, Go, it's a very strong verb in Hebrew. Leave, leave your country, the place you grew up in Ur. Leave your kindred, your family, and their gods.

Leave your father's house. Leave behind your inheritance. Leave and go to the place that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation. And I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

[ 7 : 41 ] 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. Bless, blessing, bless, bless, blessed.

Abram's call is God's plan for blessing. It's also the plan. This is the only plan. This is the whole plan. This is the promise that God has for all the families on the earth.

Everyone on earth, this is God's plan. God is going to make Abram a great nation and name. God is going to bless him. God is going to thwart any that oppose Abram, because if they oppose Abram, they're opposing God's good purposes.

He's going to do it in order to fulfill his purpose for all people, all families. And notice what it means to be chosen by God. The chosen are not pulled from the front lines and put in the reserves to be kept safe from danger.

They're the special forces. They're strategically deployed into the heart of the battle. And the special forces, God's crack team to accomplish this mission is an elderly, childless, and landless couple.

[ 8 : 56 ] Abraham and Sarai. These two are the tip of the spear in God's plan for the world's blessing. For the defeat of sin and death and disorder.

For the giving of life and flourishing in relationship. For fixing everything that's gone wrong in the first 11 chapters. This is God's impossible plan to fix things. And it all hangs on faith.

Because the chosen family must abandon Babel's strategy in order to do it. Babel says, and we heard about this last week, secure the funding, guarantee the results, plan the steps, control the outcomes, choose the best school, the best career, accrue the most wealth, make your own blessing, make your name great.

The chosen family must abandon building a human name. And instead, they have to lean entirely on God's promise to give them a name.

As well as literally everything else. Leave your house so I can give you wealth. Leave your kindred so I can make you a nation. I'll give you children since you can't make your own.

[10:02] I'll show you the way since you don't know the place. It's not for your own sake, but it's for the sake of all my scattered image bearers. John Calvin puts it like this.

I command thee to go forth with closed eyes. Until, having renounced thy country, thou shalt have given thyself wholly to me. Faith is placing our trust in God's promise.

It's putting ourself in his hands without a backup plan. Faith is revealed by obedience. So we didn't include verse 4 in this reading, but it's pretty important for this whole thing.

Verse 4, So Abram went as the Lord had told him. This is an amazing moment in Scripture that he actually goes.

And it's also just the beginning of a very long journey. Because we don't just choose to trust God one time. It's chosen every step along the journey towards the land that God shows us.

[11:08] So from that first step out of Haran towards Canaan, every single day they journeyed, they had to wake up and break camp. And decide that they were going to continue to trust God and go to the place he was calling them.

It had to be chosen anew. Perhaps what makes the story even more amazing and surprising is how many times Abram and Sarai don't choose faith in this journey in the chapters that follow.

So consider that. Abram gives his wife away to other men, not one time, but two times in the chapters that follow. They try to create an heir by their own power, not according to the promise.

So this is through Hagar, Sarah's servant. But God holds his faithfulness to them through all of that. In Genesis 15, God takes the fulfilling of the covenant upon himself.

He says it will be completed by his power. And if it fails, it will be to his own detriment. And then when we come to Genesis 22, at the end of this journey of faith for Abram, Abram stands ready to sacrifice Isaac, his son, because after a lifetime of God's faithfulness to him, he trusted the Lord.

[12:27] I'm just wanting to highlight for you that our lives of faith are also step by step. They're day by day. In testimonies, faith is very dramatic. But in our lives, faith is mostly mundane.

It's a daily leaning into God's promise. And in a myriad of ways, small and large, it's choosing the reality that we can't see over the things that are in front of us. It's treasuring what God might give us over what we earn for ourselves.

Practically, this means using our money and our time and our words and our works and our ways, everything, to invest in the city that God is building, rather than in a Babel of our own making.

What's incredible about this journey of faith that we are sent on, that Abram was sent on, is that God can use our small and repetitive steps of faith, even including our faltering, as Abram shows.

He can use all of that for blessing and salvation. That somehow, even though our faith is weak and small, this blessing of salvation is going to flow through him by God's power to all the families of the earth.

[13:43] I look at my own faith and think, it's not enough even for me. How could it be enough to be a blessing to other people? But remember, faith is not the thing that Abram is building.

Faith is leaning on the thing that God is building. Faith is leaning on the name that God is giving.

So, what God is building is this blessing for all people, and he will do it through his people.

It began with Abraham, it's revealed in Jesus, and it continues within Abraham's heirs, and that's us. And that's going to take us to our final point, which is salvation.

So, you can think of Genesis 12 like this. It's like a hyperlink. So, if you click on it, it will take you from Genesis to Jesus, very quickly, very easily.

It will take you from Abraham to Abraham's heirs by faith, which is us. And it will take you from this idea of blessing to the idea of the gospel of salvation.

[14:47] And that's what I'm going to talk about as we finish. So, how does Genesis 12 connect to Jesus? Well, the New Testament has some genealogies in it as well.

So, this is for the scholars of the genealogies again. In God's impossible plan, the barren couple bear a son, and so on, and so on, and so on. And that family grows and it continues. The family that began with Shem ends with Jesus, the son of God, the son of Mary. All of God's choosing through many, many generations, through the entire story of Israel, leads to Jesus. And Jesus was chosen not to be sheltered, but to give his life as a ransom for the many. When he was lifted up on the cross, he drew all people to himself. Having defeated sin and death, he rose again with life and blessing for all people. Having inherited the name above all names, the Shem above all Shems.

[ 15 : 47 ] Abraham is the great-great-grandfather of Jesus. So, there's one connection. But he's also our great-great-grandfather.

Not by blood, but by faith. Galatians says it like this. Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.

Know then that it is those of faith who are sons of Abraham. In other words, we receive God's blessing the same way as Abraham. By trusting the promise and the purpose and the plan of God. Instead of trusting the promise of Babel. The true family of promise, the true family of God, is the family of faith.

This principle, Paul talks about as the gospel. Believe it or not. He says it was revealed thousands of years in advance. So, Paul goes on to say this in Galatians.

[ 16 : 49 ] The scripture, he says, You could flip it the other way.

The gospel is the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. The fulfillment of his promise to bless all nations through Abraham is the gospel. The gospel is how he will bless all nations.

Jesus' death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins is how death and sin are overcome. How life and blessing are given to the world. And it all happens through faith.

And so, our daily leaning and hoping and looking to Jesus, trusting in his promises, that is how we experience God undoing sin and death in our lives.

That is how he brings life and blessing to us. It is how he will make all things new. We can take it one step even further, this connection between Genesis 12 and us.

[ 17 : 59 ] Because if by faith we truly are the sons of Abraham that receive this promise, then we carry in God's plan the same purpose that he gave to Abraham.

In other words, we are blessed to bless. We are chosen to be sent. It happens first in our faith and proclamation of the gospel.

That's God's means for doing it. So, Jesus sent apostles. He sent their apostles. He sent them to bear the glad tidings.

And now he sends us, who stand in the same gospel. God's gospel stretching from Abraham to St. John's Vancouver. This has been his promise and his purpose all along. Sending is not the exception.

Sending is the rule. By faith in Jesus, you are an heir of Abraham. And it means that you are sent out to bless others. And, like Abraham, building that blessing is impossible for you.

[ 19 : 02 ] It is impossible. We cannot do it. When I think about the idea that I might be sent to be a blessing, I immediately imagine in my mind a huge to-do list of things that I need to accomplish for that to be true.

And they're all good things. But they're also impossible things. I immediately think, well, that means if I'm going to be a... If God's blessing me to bless the world, then I've got to be socially just.

I've got to be environmentally conscious. I've got to be apologetically superior. Evangelistically winsome. I have to raise the perfect children. I have to be the perfect parent. I have to preach the perfect sermon.

But no. That's not how it works. All this is what God is doing. It's what he has done. It's what he will do. It begins with faith.

It's carried out one step at a time. It's the little by little leaning on the gospel of forgiveness and grace. He makes our name. He sends us. He saves us. He blesses others through us.

[ 20 : 11 ] And so, we can trust in his purpose. We can marinate in the gospel. We can lean into his plan. And we shouldn't be surprised that after we do that, he blesses the world through us.

Amen. Amen.