

# God's Blessing for the Nations

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Preacher: Nick Lauer

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, good morning, church. Our sermon text this morning is Genesis chapter 11. Starting in verse 10, we're going to go through chapter 12, verse 4.

That is page 8 in the Pew Bible, if you want to follow along there. If you're new to the Bible, the big numbers are the chapter numbers.

The small numbers are the verse numbers. We're going to pick up our reading about halfway through our total sermon text this morning. In chapter 11, verse 27. Let me pray as we come to God's word.

Speak, O Lord. Build your church. And fill the earth with your glory. God, what a powerful prayer that is.

Make it our own this morning. And make it a reality in our midst. Through the grace of Jesus and the power of your Holy Spirit.

[ 1 : 02 ] Amen. Genesis 11. Picking up in verse 27 through chapter 12, verse 4. Let me read this for us. Now, these are the generations of Terah.

Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran. And Haran fathered Lot. Haran died in the presence of his father, Terah, and the land of his kindred, and Ur of the Chaldeans. And Abram and Nahor took wives.

The name of Abram's wife was Sarah. And the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah. The daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and Iscah. Now Sarah was barren. She had no child. Terah took Abram, his son, and Lot, the son of Haran, his grandson.

And Sarah, his daughter-in-law, his son, Abram's wife. And they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there.

The days of Terah were 205 years. And Terah died in Haran. 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.

[ 2 : 09 ] 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. 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. So Abram went, as the Lord had told him.

And Lot went with him. Abram was 75 years old when he departed from Haran. Well, this morning, we've pretty much come to the end of our sermon series in Genesis 1 through 11.

But, obviously, we haven't come to the end of the book of Genesis. Actually, we've come to the critical turning point. And it's not just the critical turning point of the book of Genesis, but really of the whole Old Testament.

This is the turning point that will set the course of the rest of redemptive history. This is it. This is where the story turns to something special and particular and saving and exciting.

[ 3 : 17 ] This is where God's story takes its turn. And because of that, this passage is meant to serve as a turning point for our lives, too.

Here is a passage that, if you will hear it, if we will hear it, will turn your whole life around. Set you on a new trajectory and never leave you the same.

What happens in Genesis, what happens in the life of Abram, later to be called Abraham, in the history of redemption, it can happen in your life, too. So, what is it?

What is actually going on here? Well, there are three pieces to this turning point that I want us to look at today. And they're all found in verses 1 through 3 of chapter 12. And the first thing that we see is the blessing that we all need.

The blessing we all need. God calls Abram at the beginning of chapter 12 and says, I will bless you. And then in verse 3, we see that this blessing is meant to reach all the families of the earth.

[ 4 : 26 ] What is this universal blessing that begins with Abraham and spreads to the ends of the earth? Now, in order to understand this blessing, we have to see it in the context of the book of Genesis so far.

Because at first glance, it looks like it means nothing more than Abraham having a lot of descendants. I'll make you a great nation. And getting a great reputation. I'll make your name great. Now, for Abraham, this blessing certainly does mean that.

But the heart of this blessing, this universal blessing for all families of the earth, it's much deeper than that. After all, material blessing isn't really what we ultimately need.

Is it? Of course, that doesn't mean that we shouldn't seek to sacrificially help others physically, financially, socially, educationally.

All those things are entailed in loving our neighbor as ourself. They're good things. They are important things. They're worthy things. But what do we really need ultimately, eternally?

[ 5 : 38 ] How many millionaires, though they have no material needs, humanly speaking, aren't really satisfied? How many movie stars, though everyone recognizes their name and face, aren't really at peace?

I was just, I've been reading a journal lately of a famous 20th century spiritual writer who spent some missionary time in Latin America.

And he reflects on the fact that, though here he is in the middle of one of the poorest suburbs of Lima, Peru, ministering among the poor, still his heart aches for something more.

Why is it that even our best efforts at philanthropy can still leave our hearts longing? What makes us think that more money and more approval will cure the deep ache that we feel?

So what is this blessing, then, here in Genesis 12? Well, consider with me, then, the context of Genesis. Back in chapter 11, verse 10, we're given another genealogy.

[ 6 : 51 ] How many genealogies are we going to see in Genesis 1 through 11? Not another one. Yes, another genealogy, starting in verse 10. This time, from Shem, the son of Noah, down to Abraham, the son of Terah.

And from Shem to Abraham is 10 generations. Now, if you've been coming to Trinity this fall, that might remind you of another earlier genealogy in Genesis 1 through 11.

In chapter 5, Genesis gives us the genealogy from Adam to Noah. And from Adam to Noah, you guessed it, there are 10 generations.

So you start to see that there's a literary shape going on in this early part of Genesis. Think about it. In Genesis 1 through 5, what do we have?

Creation, fall, and then this sort of stretch of 10 generations. In Genesis 6 through 11, what do we have? The flood and its new creation, the fall of Babel, and then 10 generations.

[ 7 : 54 ] You see, these 10 generations are a signal that God's redemptive plan is moving forward. We're taking a big leap ahead into the next significant event.

Now, what happened after the fall of Genesis 3 and 4 and those 10 generations? The flood. Worldwide judgment.

So what would we expect to happen after the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11 in these 10 generations? Humanity rebelling against God. Again, seeking their own way and our own ambitions and their own kingdom.

If a flood fell the first time, what's going to come this time? But this time, it's different. A flood doesn't fall.

Instead, God makes a promise. A binding promise. A covenant with Abraham. I will bless you.

[ 8 : 59 ] Wonder of wonders. When humanity deserves judgment, God speaks a word of blessing. And as he speaks that word of blessing, don't you hear an echo of Genesis 1?

The story of God's creation in Genesis 1 resounds with blessing, does it not? God delighting over his creation. Declaring it all good.

Declaring it even very good. From the highest star to the most obscure atom, the whole thing. Very good. And at the climax of that story of creation in Genesis 1 28, after God creates humanity in his own image, the text says, God blessed them.

Now, we don't use this language of blessing much in our day and age, in our culture. Do we?

Sounds kind of weird, doesn't it? I bless you, my son. I bless you, my daughter.

That's a strange language for us. I get it. But you know, we know the feeling when we get it, don't we? Like a father or a mother who takes their child up in their arms and says, you, I love you.

[10:19] And I know you'll do great things and I will be with you every step of the way. It's you. Deep down in our bones, we know what it means to be blessed, to be accepted, to be approved, to find favor in someone's eyes.

Yes, we know it, even if we don't use this language for it. But perhaps we know it most, tragically, by its absence. Those deep wounds of rejection, of abandonment, we know at our gut level what blessing means because so often we don't have it.

But deeper under those human rejections and abandonments, even deeper still, the heart knows that divine blessing, that peace with God intended in creation, that creational, divine blessing. Deep down we know it's been lost. That we're actually out of joint with our creator, that we're alienated from our true home.

And again, is this not the story that we've been reading in Genesis? Is this not the history of everyone and everything? Creation begins in blessing, but humans rebel against God, reject God as God, and the result is curse.

[11:49] Genesis 3 tells the whole story. Genesis 4 describes the fallout. And the rest of human history, and the rest of human history, friends, is the sad tale of creatures seeking some sort of remedy for that lost blessing in created things rather than their creator.

Why doesn't the money satisfy? Why doesn't the fame bring peace? Because the real blessing you're longing for isn't from a creature or a created thing. You were made to have the blessing of your maker.

When God says to Abram, I'll bless those who bless you, and those who dishonor you, I will curse. He's not just saying that the status of the nations will be determined by their relationship to Abram. But more than that, God is promising in those words to be Abram's defender and shield. To be closer than a brother, to be jealous over Abram like a lover.

That's what these words are talking about. The quality of the Lord's relationship with Abram now. And that's the blessing we need. To be right with God. To have God no longer as our judge, but as our friend.

[13:07] But how in the world can God bless sinners who deserve his curse?

This is the great problem, the great question that hangs pregnant over the entire Old Testament. In Genesis 6, after 10 generations, it was a flood that fell, and only a few were saved.

In Genesis 12, after the 10 generations, we expect some sort of judgment, but the flood doesn't fall. On what basis does this blessing to Abram for all families of the earth come to us?

And the answer to that question wouldn't come for almost 1,500 years after Abram. The curse humanity deserved, that you and I deserved, would actually fall like a flood, but it would fall on another.

It would fall on the true offspring of Abraham, on the child born into Abram's family who would take up our humanity and live a life in perfect acceptance with his heavenly father.

[14:24] He would be utterly blessed. God would say over him, this is my beloved son in whom I'm well pleased.

And then at 30 years of age, after walking in perfect, blessed fellowship with his father, Jesus would go willingly to a cross and become a curse for us.

And all the wretchedness of sin and all the dark intentions and malicious thoughts of our hearts, Jesus Christ would bear all of it.

The Old Testament law said, cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree. And in the first century, there was no greater expression of that than a Roman cross.

As the victims hung naked and shamed and bleeding and mocked, the pain of crucifixion was only matched by the public humiliation and shame of it.

[15:31] You see, the Romans saved crucifixion for the social nobodies. This was the way the empire disposed of its trash. And there, God incarnate hung.

The flood of human depravity and the curse of sin poured upon him. Why?

So that the blessing you and I were created to have could be ours once more. In love, Christ became a curse so that a blessing might come to all nations, to you and me.

That's what Paul was getting on about in that passage we read earlier. The perfect blessed one stands in our place of the curse so that we, the cursed ones, could receive a blessing.

What wonderful good news. Consider then, friends, that you cannot earn this blessing of God.

[16:46] That's also part of what Paul's talking about in Galatians 2 that we read earlier. All who rely on works of the law, that is your performance, your pedigree, all who rely on those things remain under a curse.

Could that be why the harder we try to get peace through achievement and through approval and through human relationships, the harder we try, the more peace seems so elusive.

Abram did nothing to deserve God's blessing. He was just following his dad on what seemed to be a fool's errand.

You can do nothing to deserve God's blessing. It's not a reward for hard work done. It's a gift given through the promise purchased by Christ.

This blessing that we all need is a great equalizer then, is it not? All of us, rich or poor, black or white, male or female, high or low, all of us stand as equals when it comes to what really matters.

[17:55] All of us receive God's blessing sheerly by grace as a gift. None can say, I deserved it. As one great old hymn puts it, nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling.

And that means we are all alike in dignity as well. God took the curse and promised the blessing for all who believe.

Maybe you don't enjoy many material blessing in this life, but the Christian has a blessing that makes every other blessing seem like fool's gold in comparison.

The acceptance of God, an inheritance in his kingdom, the dignity of a child of God. Each and every one of you in Christ.

So this turning point, first, is about the blessing we all need. Second, it's about the departure we must take.

[19:02] God's blessing comes to Abram through sheer grace, but in response, the Lord tells Abram to go. Notice how verse one moves from the general to the specific.

Go from your country, your kindred, and even your father's house to the land that I will show you.

And the great question here is, will Abram believe God's promise and go?

Now, don't think that this was an easy decision for Abram. Look at the text. He's getting old. His wife is barren.

His familial duties to his father have moved him halfway across the known world from Ur to Haran.

And now, his father has just died. Grieving his father, Abram is a stranger in a strange land, now solely responsible for his dead brother's son, Lot, but with no children of his own.

Now, what's a person to do in that situation? The natural thing to do is to go back to Ur. Go back to your homeland. Go back to your extended family where you know people and where you and Sarah can settle down and hopefully find some extended relative to take care of you in your old age.

[20:21] Isn't this what reason and common sense would demand? Isn't this what reason and common sense would demand? But then comes the promise of God, the promise of blessing, if Abram will trust God's word and go.

Now, unlike Abram, God isn't necessarily telling us to leave our physical countries and homes.

Abram did have a unique role in redemptive history.

So, who are we most like in this story? Well, I think you and I must first put ourselves in the shoes of those families, the nations.

That is, all the families of the earth in verse 3. That's us in this story. But we have a departure to make as well.

because where is blessing to be found for us? Not in a piece of land, but in a person. What does the text say?

[21:33] In you, Abram, all the families of the earth shall be blessed. That is, to receive the blessing of God, we must find it in him.

only by identifying with Abraham's family is there any hope of anyone, of any family getting God's blessing.

And as the biblical story unfolds into the New Testament, we see in the opening chapter of Matthew 1, as the New Testament opens up, that the offspring of Abraham, the fulfillment of this promise in whom the nations will find their blessing, the fulfillment is Jesus.

How do we get into the spiritual family of Abraham? It's not by circumcision, but by uniting ourselves in faith to Jesus Christ, the promised one of Abraham, the one in whom all these promises of blessing find their yes in God.

But identifying with Jesus certainly means a departure. A departure no less than that of Abraham in Genesis 12.

[ 22 : 53 ] Our identity, the thing that we base our life on, the thing that you maybe could point to and say, that's who I am. That center of our life has to shift.

the primary identity of our life can no longer be our family background, our moral uprightness, our work success. The primary identity must be the person of Jesus, who he is and what he's done.

And make no mistake about it, God's blessing is found nowhere else. God doesn't bless Abraham and say, you will be one of many spiritual roads back to my favor.

It's not what he says. No, only in you, Abraham, only in the thing that I'm starting with you will all the families of the earth be blessed.

Why? Because only through Jesus does God deal with the real problem. Only in Jesus does God deal with the curse, with sin.

[ 24 : 13 ] I mean, think about it. If there was any other way for us to get back to God, why would God send his only son to die for us? If his blessing could come through some other means or some other path, why would the father allow his only son to bear the curse and the shame of crucifixion?

It's the only way. And so we must make the departure from an identity built on whatever we might be trusting in to an identity built ultimately on Christ alone.

and that's a radical departure. More radical than leaving country and kindred and father's house.

In fact, it's a departure so radical that according to the New Testament, you actually can't make it on your own. we cling too tightly to our old identities.

They're, after all, our security and our comfort and our hope. We don't want to let that go and make Jesus the center of our life. There's too much at stake.

[ 25 : 32 ] There's friends that I'll lose and there's pleasures that I'll forgo and there's ridicule that I'll receive. you can't make this departure on your own.

But thankfully, Jesus didn't leave us on our own. After three days in the grave, Jesus rose again in power and he spent 40 days with his disciples and then ascended to the Father in heaven completing his redemptive work and sitting at the Father's right hand telling his disciples to wait for the promise of the Holy Spirit.

And at Pentecost, the Spirit came and it changed him from the inside out. And the Holy Spirit continues the same work today.

The Spirit, you see, liberates us to let go of our old identities and to find the beauty of Christ and take hold of him and be found in him. This departure of faith is the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit and he's doing it today.

all across the world as people release this and take hold of their Savior. Perhaps he's doing it in you right now.

[ 26 : 51 ] Compelling you, calling you to rest in this Savior who loves you with an infinite love and to hear the word of divine blessing your heart so longs to hear you are my son, you are my daughter, in you I'm well pleased.

And as we set out on this departure, the promise is that the Spirit never leaves us. You see, the departure of conversion is just the start of a lifelong pilgrimage of faith.

In Hebrews chapter 11, the author talks again about this moment in Abram's life just like Paul did in Galatians chapter 3. Here in Hebrews chapter 11, Hebrews comes back to this moment in Abram's life talking about how Abram had to go.

Not knowing what lie ahead, trusting God's word. This lifelong journey wasn't easy for Abram. And the reality is, friends, it won't be easy for us.

There will be years of discouragement and trial. Abram will often find himself in trouble and conflict. At one point in his life, he has to muster up an army and go lead a liberation band to free Lot from some kings who had kidnapped him.

[ 28 : 19 ] There will be years of doubt and uncertainty for us. Abram and Sarah have remained childless for decades after this moment, wondering when God would ever do what he was going to do and kind of doubting it was going to happen and at one point even laughing because it seems so absurd.

There will be moments of confusion and pain. Abram was called to offer over his only son to the Lord. But through it all, God never left Abraham.

Hebrews 11 says, we're looking forward to a city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. The journey of faith may have many twists and turns.

The road may seem to crumble beneath us, but God will bring us safely home. So, Christian, if you're in a season of trial, of doubt, if you cannot hear or feel the blessing of God at this moment, hold on.

God has not abandoned you. You remain his beloved child. Though all the world may shake and crumble, the crucified and risen Christ stands up for you and the Holy Spirit abides within.

[ 29 : 41 ] So keep pressing on God's promise remains and nothing can shake it. But as we take this departure of faith, trusting in God's promise of blessing, there's a third element to this turning point.

We've seen the blessing that we all need and the departure that we must take. But third, the mission that we now have. God tells Abram in verse 2, I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing.

Abraham was blessed to be a blessing. Some of my friends in ministry would probably say, now that'll preach. Abram was blessed to be a blessing.

What he received was meant to overflow to others. Now imagine the nation of Israel hearing Moses recite this story on the verge of crossing into the promised land. What they heard wasn't just the promise of God's blessing for them, but that through them that blessing would come to all nations. They were hearing that they had a mission to bring blessing to all the families of the earth. And it's the same with the people of God today, with the church today. In Christ, we have received every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, and that blessing is meant to overflow.

[ 31 : 05 ] Jesus says to us, you're the light of the world. You are the salt of the earth. Your life isn't meant to be lived for yourself, but for the great purposes of God in the world.

There are people groups on earth today who have never heard the good news of Jesus Christ. How will we as a church play a part in bringing God's news of blessing to them?

Perhaps God is calling your life to be a part of that story and to go. There are people right here in our city who are struggling to find warm places to stay, to put food on their tables, to get through school and graduate.

How are we as a church bringing God's blessing to them? You see, something happens when you receive the good news of Jesus, when the Holy Spirit unites you to Christ through faith.

And you become a recipient of grace, of God's favor and blessing. What happens is you start to sit loose to a lot of other stuff in your life. Because the reality is, at a deep spiritual level, you don't need it anymore.

[ 32 : 19 ] You don't need to hoard possessions and money. In Christ, you have an internal inheritance that will never fade. You have a dignity and a worth that money literally cannot buy.

money. So you can be sacrificially generous now. Money has lost its power over your life and you can give it away. And you don't need to cling tightly to your time.

In Christ, you literally have all the time in the world and in the world to come. time. So you can take time to spend with others.

And you can make your schedule revolve around things other than your own entertainment and your own pursuits. God doesn't want the blessing to stop with you.

He wants it to keep going. Question, how are you blessing others right here in your church family? How are you actively serving and loving others right here?

[ 33 : 24 ] You know, if we should learn anything from our modern culture, it is that mere consumption makes us bored. Man, how, okay, true confessions, how many of you really wished that the Mandalorian that just got released on Disney Plus was something you could just stream all eight episodes of?

If you have no idea what I'm talking about, you come up to me afterwards and we'll pray about it. Right? You want to just binge it, but we got to wait every week.

But how many of us after binging that Netflix show we've been waiting so long to see? Gosh, we just feel so bored. It's just kind of icky.

Don't just be a consumer in the spiritual family of the church. Be a participant. Take up your part to play. Get about the mission. Produce the show that's unfolding right before your eyes.

You are blessed to be a blessing and there in that mission, you will find what you were created for. A deeper communion with God.

[ 34 : 38 ] friends, you were created to know God. Jesus says, eternal life is knowing me. Has it ever struck you that you need to find God's face in the mission?

Because that's where God meets us. Because after all, God is a missionary God. When he wants to bless Abraham, he sends him halfway across the known world.

God's a missionary God. You will meet him in the mission. God's a missionary God. The father sent the son. And the son sent the spirit.

And the spirit sends the church. And there in the sending, in the going, God meets us. So friends, as we conclude, is there a turning point for you in this passage?

Perhaps the turning point is to see that God really does love you. And that in Jesus, he's done everything to bring you home and accept you. Perhaps the turning point is to stop trusting in your own self and your own accomplishments and to take the departure of faith in Christ and to make him the center of your life and strike out on the pilgrimage that he's calling you to.

[ 36 : 00 ] you. Perhaps the turning point is for you to hold on in the midst of trial, to keep putting one foot in front of the other. Perhaps the turning point is to join the mission, to find out how the blessing of God is meant to flow through you to others.

But let us be encouraged by the last verse of our passage. The turning point for Abraham, the point of his spiritual departure came when he was 75 years old.

You see, it is never too late to begin. No matter how long you've spent searching, no matter how many detours or mistakes your life has made, today can be the turning point.

The Lord called Abraham and promised him blessing. And in Christ, through his spirit, he calls us today as well. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we ask that you would meet us as we come to your table and help us by your Holy Spirit to make the departures that we need to make so that we might live in line with the truth of this great blessing that you've given to us.

Amen. Amen.