

Genesis 12:1-3 Redemption's Beginning 1/14/18

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 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. ³ 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."

(Pastor prays)

Today we've come to the patriarchs, the very foundation of redemption's history, a history that finds its zenith in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, a history so real and so universal that every man and woman – *you* – will one day be judged on what you did with this history.

With the exception of Jesus Christ, Abraham is arguably the most important person in the entire Bible, but not for the reasons that scholars might say: that he is the founder of three great world religions and the progenitor of monotheism. No, it goes deeper than that. Abraham is the prototype and forerunner of our doctrine of salvation, that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

Great sections of the New testament are devoted to Abraham. Romans tells us we are justified by grace through faith and Abraham is the example. Galatians tells us in Christ we are saved by God apart from our works and Abraham is the example. Hebrews commands us to live like Abraham – a man of faith. Three times in the Bible, Abraham is called a "friend of God." And today we meet him at the beginning of his journey of faith. Every journey of faith has a beginning, and I'm hoping today will be yours. We've read just three verses in Chapter 12 and we did that for a reason. Everything before these three verses in Genesis is leading up to it and everything after Genesis 12:1-3 is fulfilling it. It's why we spent last year on the first 11 chapters and will spend this year on finishing the book. And we start with the most important part of Abraham's life, God's call on his life.

The great reformer Martin Luther said that this passage should be written in letters of gold and read to every person in every nation and language. And God has brought you here today to hear what He has to say, to listen to His call and do something that matters. I don't want to spend my life doing something that just doesn't matter. In an effort to avoid that today, we take a look at God's call to Abraham and what that call means to you and me in 2018.

God's Call is Always Grounded in Grace

In fact, grace is a good place to start.

God's Sovereign Grace Saves Us

Let's take a look at God's call to Abraham right there in verse 1. *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.* Before we get too far into discussing this call, think with me about the man Abraham, who he is and where he is from.

We don't have to travel too far back in the Bible to find out that before God called to Abraham he was just another man who didn't know the God of the Bible. In fact, when Joshua describes him in Joshua 24, he says that Abraham and his family served other gods and now, in Genesis 12, God comes to him when he's 75 years old.

At 75, he's already lived a whole bunch of his life, and in verse 1 all of his life is going to change when God breaks in. Before this, Abraham may have been a great man but only because he had been made by a *great* God. The history of redemption is like the history of Creation and like the history of your salvation. It begins with God speaking. Think of it, what would Abraham have been without the sovereign God breaking into his life? He would be been just another well-situated idol worshipper riding first class right to Hell.

And just as a side note for those of you here who are not Christians and maybe don't know much about God or the Bible or what goes on in church – before Abraham knew *anything* about God, God came to *him*.

Now look and see what this sovereign grace involves. Look what God calls him to do, and as I read it in verse 1, notice the growing degrees of separation.

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.

Do you see the three segments that Abram must leave behind? Country, kindred and father's house. Without going into great detail, let me just point out the obvious. The three segments that Abram must leave behind to obey God go from the broad to the specific and gives us a call to separate. And brothers and sisters, this is the call of discipleship: to exchange the known for the unknown, to give up the familiar and take hold of the uncomfortable. This is the very thing Jesus calls us to when He calls us to the cross.

Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 10:38-39, *And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.* This is an *absolute* call: leaving your prejudice and pride, your sins and past, your hang-ups and addictions at the cross and, by the power and call of God, be made new, a child of God, and that's sovereign grace and it can honestly be unnerving because you won't always know what's ahead.

Let me show you what I mean. Look again at verse 1 and the direction at the end of it. *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.* Leave what you know and go into what you don't know and may never completely understand. God's direction at the end of verse 1 is terribly ambiguous. Now look, here is a word for those of you who feel like you are drifting or are on hold or not sure what the next step is. You need to circle that little phrase of a promise at the end of verse 1: "I will show you." There's one little phrase you need to leave here with today. Trust God. When you can't see and don't feel and are not even sure you care anymore, you feel like you've aged out. Trust God. Your sin, your future, your anger – the cross of Jesus is the place where God has displayed His ultimate grace and has said – you can trust.

God's Sovereign Grace Provides for Us

Let's read verses 2-3 together. I'll read it and then go back and talk about it a bit. *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. ³ 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.” In verses 1-3, God heaps up a phrase that should remind us of how God provides. Look at it. Verse 1 – I will show you. Verse 2 – I will make you a great nation. I will bless you. I will make your name great. Verse 3 – I will bless those who bless you and I will curse those who curse you. This is God’s doing. He is working to bless. You know something that is amazing? In Genesis Chapters 1-11, the word “bless” occurs 5 times in 11 chapters. Now, the word “bless” occurs 5 times in these 3 verses. This is an unconditional promise of unconditional provision.

So often we get the cart before the horse and miss the entire point of God’s goodness and grace. God didn’t see Abraham’s faithfulness and then decide to call and bless him. God saw him as a wandering idol-worshipper and saved him. What Jonathan Edwards said is true: “You and I contribute nothing to our salvation except the sin that made it necessary.” And yet by His grace and because of His love, He saves and provides in Jesus Christ.

Let me point out one last thing. God’s sovereign grace saves us. God’s sovereign grace provides for us.

God’s Sovereign Grace Redeems Us

You find redemption in verse 3. It’s near the end of the verse. Let’s read it. *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.*”

In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. This is important. The blessing promised here is not some general blessing of meeting undefined physical needs or a vague sense of happiness. This is a *special* blessing that deals with the problems that you and I face as creatures who answer to a holy God. The Apostle Paul chooses this verse right here and says this is the Gospel. Listen to what Paul says in Galatians 3:8. *And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.”*

The Bible has one story. Redemption. As God’s fallen creatures, we are under judgment. You can feel it. Sin has tightened on us like a boa constrictor, and each time you exhale, it only gets tighter. Some of you this morning are not in right relationship with God. What we need is a redeemer who can deliver us from the wrath of God and free us from the sin that’s choking out the life, and this is what Jesus accomplished.

In verse 3, Jesus is how all the families of the earth shall be blessed. This passage points past Abraham and to the person of Jesus Christ, and it is Christ alone, His death on the cross, that is the blessing of God.

And you are blessed of God when you are found in Christ. Are you trusting God? Are you found in Christ?

(Pastor extends the invitation and prays)