

**July 12, 2020**  
**Blessed to Be a Blessing**  
**Genesis 12:1-4**

Comedian Jeff Foxworthy says, *"If you ever start feeling like you have the goofiest, craziest, most dysfunctional family in the world, all you have to do is go to a state fair. Because five minutes at the fair, you'll be going, 'you know, we're alright. We are dang near royalty.'"*

Imagine this kind of a family. His son and his wife couldn't resist the beautiful (poisoned) apples, ate them, and died. One grandson killed another (Genesis 4). The kids, grandkids and great grandkids were all corrupt and violent (Genesis 6:11); everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil (Genesis 6:5). Even the good one drank too much (Genesis 9:20-21). They were arrogant, conceited, self-centred, and never gave God a thought (Genesis 11:1-7). They are scattered hither and yon and have lost all contact with their father. He has tried to reach them, but they just won't listen. Their lives are a mess.

Welcome to Genesis 3-11! It reads a bit like a spaghetti Western. When you read through from the giving-in-to-temptation of Adam and Eve, Cain murdering Abel, there is "evil throughout the earth," Noah (the one "righteous" man) naked and drunk, the audacity of Babel, you shake your head and think, "Boy these people are messed up!"

But of course you really don't need to read/watch/google today's news to know that people are still messed up: giving in to temptation, murdering one another, struggling with addiction, and think they (and only they) are God's answer to all the world's problems ...

Back to the Wild West. What does the Dad do? He loves his children. He wants them to know that. He wants to have a relationship with them. He knows the greatest blessing they can have is to be reconciled to him and to be reconciled to one another. What does he do? What could he do? He has tried the punishment thing (Genesis 6, the Flood) – that didn't really help (right afterwards Noah goes off the wagon!).

He could try the reach-out-in-love thing? One son is not too bad. He keeps in touch – a bit. He has wandered, but the father tracks down that one son, takes him aside and says, *"My boy, I am going to pour my life into you and I will bless you. I will take care of you. Because you do have a bit of a relationship with your brothers and sisters, I want you to tell them I love them and show my love to them. I want you to bless them on my behalf. The greatest blessing they can have is to be reconciled to me, to you, and to one another.*

*"So I want you to leave your homestead, and head off to a distant land, find your brothers and sisters, and tell them I love them. Invite them to come home ..."*

Welcome to Genesis 12. *"The Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you'"* (12:1-3).

This is a pivotal point of the story of the Bible. Up till now, God has let people try to figure things out on their own – and they haven't done a good job of it. When He does the ultimate punishment thing (the Flood) and only one "righteous" man and his family survive, that fellow turns out to be a drunkard. And his family goes way off the rails. But in Genesis 12:1-3, God calls Abram (later renamed Abraham) to bring God's good news to *"all peoples on earth."* God is starting over. God is taking control. He will bless Abraham and his family (the people of Israel). But His ultimate purpose is to bless all people! And what is "blessing"?

Ultimately, blessing means to be reconciled to God, to be reconciled to one another, and to be reconciled (to live in peace) in God's world as Adam and Eve did, in the very beginning. The Hebrew/Old Testament word for this is "shalom" – a comprehensive word that describes being at peace ... in every way, with everyone and with all of God's creation.

The story of how that blessing for the nations comes about is the story of the rest of the Bible. The Bible ends with an amazing vision of a whole new, redeemed creation, where, John says, *"There before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. ... And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb'"* (Revelation 7:22-26). The mess of Babel is undone. People are united in worship.

Genesis 12 through Revelation tell the saga of God, trying to work with the descendants of Abraham, to bring about this reconciliation. God wants all people to know of His love, grace, and mercy. But Abraham and his family barely understand God's grace. They are hardly able to share it. (Spoiler alert – universe-shattering spoiler alert – ultimately one person – one descendant of Abraham, makes this whole process of redemption and reconciling come about, and that person is Jesus (the "Lamb" in Revelation 7)).

What I want us to focus on this morning, however, is this command in Genesis 12:1-3. This blessing for all nations is the bottom line of God's promise to Abraham. It is repeated five times in Genesis alone: 12:1-3, 18:18, 22:18, 26:4-5, 28:14.

So why is that important? Because God wants ALL people, from ALL nations to be reconciled to Him, to know Him, to walk with Him, to be at peace with Him – and with one another – and with His world. That's a big deal. In New Testament terms we would call this "the gospel" or "the good news": *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life"* (John 3:16) – bracket out how God does this and simply notice the great news of God's purpose: *"God so loved the world (so we) should not perish but have eternal life."*

This is the good news: God loves the world so much He wants everyone to have faith in Him. When we do that, we have life – eternal life, now and forever – with Him.

### ***What is this all about?***

Let's go back to Genesis 1:1-3:9 ... before all the bad stuff. There is this wonderful picture of

life, real life, as God intended it to be: *"The man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day ... and he called to them ..."* (3:8-9). God wants to enjoy spending time with people! He wants to walk with us. He wants to talk with us. Inevitably He wants to hear about our lives and share His plans with us ... This is a basic purpose for which we are created. This is what blessing – shalom – looks like.

We are not back there yet. Ultimately Revelation presents us with this amazing vision of a renewed, restored, redeemed, reconciled, re-everything-ed relationship with God. But this ideal is still to be totally fulfilled, only when Jesus returns again. In the meantime, there is still a lot of Genesis 3-11 – a whole lot of evil – in the world!

And in the meantime, we continue in the mission that God gave to Abraham, to go and to be a blessing to all peoples on earth. The ultimate blessing is to know God – to really know God – to be reconciled to Him, to really know one another – to be reconciled to one another – to live well in – to be reconciled with – God's creation. This is our good news:

*"Understand that those who have faith are children of Abraham. Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles (non-Jews) by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.' So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith ... So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise"* (Galatians 3:6-9, 26-29).

The good news for us – this side of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection – is that, by God's grace, in faith, we can have life, real life. As we confess and repent, our sins are forgiven and our relationship with God is restored. We have the privilege of God:

- God wanting to walk with us (His Holy Spirit – His personal presence – is with and in each one of us, all the time, everywhere we go)
- God wanting to talk with us (we are invited to pray – to talk – directly to God, our loving Father. No priests, no intermediaries, no rituals, no prescribed words ... we can just talk with Him, anywhere, anytime [or everywhere, all the time!])
- God wanting to share our lives (as we pray, we can share – He wants us to share – our joys and sorrows, our hopes and fears, our successes and our failures)
- God wanting to share His plans with us (He brings opportunities to encourage, inspire, help, teach, strengthen, and make a difference in the lives of others)

But there are two parts to the good news in Genesis 12. ***The first part is: "Go ..."*** Go where? The text is a bit vague about where Abraham is to go TO (*"to the land I will show you"* – that's annoying). It asks us to go to ... a place of faith, that God will only show us as we step out. It does tell us, however, specifically where Abraham is to go from (*"your country, your people, your father's household"*). Abraham, and his family are among those scattered after Babel (Genesis 11:1-9). God is asking him to step out from a world of pride, ambition, arrogance, and self-reliance (Babel) and step toward faith, trust, and obedience.

Abraham actually goes! At age 75 – ten years past retirement age – he steps out from his old secure life and, in faith, risks everything, not knowing where this is all going to end. This stepping out in faith is the overwhelming character trait that Abraham is praised for in the New testament (Galatians 3:6-9, Romans 1:18, Hebrews 11:8-10). Abraham steps into a whole new life – a life of risk, adventure, stress, hope, and fulfilment. Sometimes Abraham succeeds brilliantly. Other times he fails miserably. But he, in the end, he always keeps the faith. When he falls down, he gets up and keeps walking.

God invites us each of us, generally, to come *"to the land I will show you."* He invites us to rediscover the open relationship with God, the restored relationships with one another, the perfect relationships with all of God's creation, for which He intended us. The Bible uses the phrases "born again" and "eternal life" to describe this free and open fellowship we have with God and one another, through Jesus. He does want you to come and discover that He wants to walk with you and talk with you, just as He did with Adam and Eve in the garden. Thank God for what God He has done and is doing in your life. This is amazing grace.

God may also be inviting us, specifically, in faith, to step out to follow Him *"to the land I will show you."* He had a particular plan and calling for Abraham. He has a particular plan and calling for me and you, too. What if – even at age 75? – God is inviting us to step out into a whole new life – a life of risk, adventure, stress, hope, and fulfilment? Maybe the specifics are a bit vague? Maybe we can't see where this is going? Will we step out in faith? Sometimes we will succeed brilliantly. Other times we may fail miserably. Will we keep on walking?

Perhaps this is a season where we can spend more time reflecting on what God might be saying to us. Is God calling us to go *"to the land I will show you."* To step out in faith?

***The second part of the command is: be a blessing.*** God's promise is NOT for one ethnic group, race, nationality, or socio-economic group – it's an invitation to everyone. (Thankfully! – otherwise a working-class Brit like myself, descended from farm labourers, coal miners, and plumbers wouldn't have a chance!). The picture at the end of Scripture is a new reality in which *"All nations will walk in the light of the glory of the Lord ... And all the nations will bring their glory and honour into the city (where God is present)"* (Revelation 21:24-26). God's mission is that ALL people come to know Him.

Don't give up on anyone! Or any people group. God – the creator of the universe – is still doing amazing things in our world! Pray for people you know who need to know Him.

This is a season when we can pray. We glibly say, "Prayer is the most powerful force in the universe." Do we believe it? Will we pray for those who need to know Jesus? Can we ask His Spirit to help us share what He has done in our lives. And will we be willing to step out, in faith, to be a blessing, to be God's amazing grace to someone around us?

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