

Genesis 12:1-9  
Blessed to Be a Blessing  
Rev. Jonathan P. Cornell  
10-2-16

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I'm so glad we're together in worship. For those of you who are new, it is good that you are with us, and for those of you who choose to be here each week, it is texts like this one that we are looking at today that give meaning and purpose to our commitment. We are not just here because we like the people who are sitting around us or have a particular affinity for one type of music or another. We are here because we believe that by placing our lives before this open Word that the God of the universe has something unique to say to us.

Today's text is just such a text. The words of today's text are perhaps some of the most important and culture defining words ever written.

Now by way of connecting this week with last week, God's intent in flooding the earth was to start fresh—new creation. God was not under the illusion that this time people would finally get it. That wasn't the purpose of the flood, the flood was not a do over. What the rainbow signified was God's promise that retribution would never again be God's answer for the people's wrongdoings. God's character would forever be kind, merciful, forbearing—that didn't mean that God would become a doormat, though.

In chapter 11, the people got it in their minds that they could rise to the level of God. So they built a tower, and as a result, God confused their speech and scattered them abroad over the face of the earth.

Now we come to the story of Abram. The Bible says that Abram's father Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot, and Abram's wife Sarai, and they went out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of the Canaan, but when they came to the land of Haran, they settled there.

We don't know that much about Abram's life in Haran, except that they were pretty comfortable. Later it says that they were very wealthy. So much so that when Abram's caravan came through Egypt, it caused even the Pharaoh's eyebrows to rise.

More on this in a bit.

Then God speaks to Abram and he says to him, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land I will show you. 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."

This is what we're searching for after all, isn't it? Whether we realize it or not, it's why we're all here. We're all here because deep down we want to hear what God has in mind for our lives, right? It may not be a grand calling, but aren't we after a way to make the world, or at least my family, a little better? What we want is to be blessing to someone.

We want someone to get up at our funeral and say “So-and-so did the best with what they were given and made a difference to those around them.” This is the kind of legacy we want to leave, right? This is how we want to be remembered.

Well then, do you notice how this legacy begins for Abram? God says go, leave the place of comfort and familiarity; leave the place of routine and ease; leave the place where things seem to be on autopilot and go.

Ok God, go where?

To the place I will show you.

I don’t know if I like the sound of this deal.

What we want is for God to show us each step of the way and give us the resources up front to make our journey easy and comfortable. That’s what we want. What God gives us, however, is a call... “go.” Take this journey—whether it’s a family or career journey, moving to a new place, serving in a new ministry, or perhaps your journey is just a project that feels like more than you can handle.

When in your life have you been led “to a land God will show you”? Many of you have heard about our journey to get to Wabash. For me, it began in an apartment living room in St Paul, Minnesota, the night I received word that Princeton Seminary was admitting me (I guess I fooled them). New Jersey, that’s different, but I suppose I can spend a few years there.

After graduation, it was a call to North Jersey... I can’t seem to get out of this state. Little did I know that it was there that I would begin dating the woman of my dreams. After our marriage, it was 6 months living rent-free with some much older roommates (otherwise known as my in-laws). The next call was literally off the grid in Southern Illinois. It was a church 5 miles outside of a town of 550 people, where our closest neighbor was a 75-year-old paranoid schizophrenic with 35 cats. I’ve got to say, God, I’m not all that impressed with this journey you’re leading me on. But here we would spend two of the most formative years of our lives, here our son Christian was born, here we learned to depend solely on one another and God—because there wasn’t anyone else. Here is where God brought us so that we were far enough from the distractions of city life that he could show us what it really means to be blessed to be a blessing.

Now imagine, if God had told me in advance where I/we were going to go. Back in that apartment in St. Paul I might have thought to myself, “You know, I wonder if Best Buy or Target Corporation is hiring?”

The marker of a genuine calling from God is that it offers more questions than answers and invites us to step out into the unknown in an act of faith. And that, my friends, is a grace. Because if you knew where it was going to lead and what it would involve, it would scare the daylights out of you.

Mercy unfolds along the way. God gives us grace enough for today. It doesn’t come before you need it and it always provides just enough for your need. The saying goes, “God’s timing is never too early and never too late, it’s always just right.”

The way the calling in your life comes is it always invites you to leave. It didn't come when Abram's father had settled, it came when Abram was called to go. Throughout the Bible, faith is developed among the people when they are asked to go. It's not given up front, but learned along the way, as people are blessed to be a blessing.

Our faith in God is always developed and strengthened on the way. And it's not a direct way, either. The Israelites never took the direct road to their destination. Whether it was from Haran to Canaan, or Egypt back to Canaan, God always leads us on the winding road, on the hard road. But we shouldn't be surprised, because that is where true spiritual and emotional strength is forged, on the hard road.

Even when they finally reach the Promised Land, what do they do? They walk around in circles around the city of Jericho. They're always moving away from or closer to the land. The only time they get into trouble is when they settle down.

There is no settling down in our walk with God. You may not be moving around physically, but hopefully you are moving in your walk of faith. Hopefully you are on a journey, learning and growing in your trust in and dependence upon the God who is on the move.

In the New Testament, when Jesus calls his disciples, what's the first word he always uses? Leave. Leave your fishing nets, leave your tax booths, leave your father and mother, leave what you're clinging to. Leave your sin. Leave your guilt. Leave your fear. Leave your self-righteousness and follow me. Don't settle anymore.

The life that is fully alive in Jesus Christ is a life that is full of drama, full of excitement, full of adventure, because we're not thinking about settling, instead we're thinking about following. And along the way, they became much less concerned with where they were going and much more concerned about being a blessing along the way.

You are blessed to be a blessing. The blessings that come to you are not for you or because of you; they are there so that you and I can bear witness to the good, good Father. Sometimes sacrifice is what it takes for us to see that clearly.

When Abraham finally made it to Canaan, the first thing he did was he set up an altar. In all their time in Canaan, they have good times and bad times, they have good choices and really bad choices. But Abraham just keeps setting up altars. He sets up altars so that he can place the good and the bad on it and sacrifice them both, so that he can get back to his true calling, which is to be a blessing along the way on the journey. Maybe we need altars, too.

What do we need to put on the altars of our lives? Maybe it's our well planned family or retirement, or our 401k. Maybe it's our notoriety or community recognition. Maybe it's the need to always be in control. Maybe it's our tradition. Or maybe what you need to place on the altar is your shame, your insecurity, your guilt.

Abraham never stopped building altars; neither should we. So that now your heart and your hands are free to be a blessing. Because that is at the heart of God's plan for your life. No matter where you go, be very clear, you are blessed to be a blessing.