

A Blessing For All The Earth

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today. A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats but because we're following Jesus together as one community and as we follow Jesus together we become convinced that there's no one so good they don't need God's grace and no one so bad that they can't have it which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in his Word. We have taken a break from our series in the Gospel of Mark for the season of Advent. You'll remember that the season of Advent is a time when we celebrate Jesus coming or arriving here on earth and we do a couple things. First of all we celebrate what God has done in the past already by sending Christ and then we also look forward to what he's going to do in the future when we see Christ come again. And so as Christians we're always doing this. We're always looking back to what God has done in the past. We're looking forward to what he will do in the future and we use both of those things to keep going and to live faithfully now in the present. Last week we were in

Genesis chapter 3 and we saw that Jesus is the one who's going to come and put an end to shame. He's going to be the one who comes and destroys and crushes evil forever. We saw that promise from chapter 3 verse 15. He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel. Meaning that while Satan is going to be able to hurt Jesus he will not crush him. Jesus on the other hand will crush the head of the serpent. We're fast forwarding eight or nine chapters this morning all the way to Genesis chapter 12 and we're going to look not as Jesus is the one who ends shame but this morning Jesus is the one who brings the blessing to the nations. And so without further ado I'm going to invite you to turn with me now. You can turn near the end of your worship guide. You can also turn in your Bible or turn on your phone.

No matter where you turn remember that this is God's word and God tells us that his word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path which means that God has not left us to stumble alone in the dark but instead he's given us his word to show us the way to go. And so that's why we start now. Genesis chapter 11 verse 27. 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 in the land of his kindred in Ur of the Chaldeans.

And Abram and Nahor took wives. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai and the name of Nahor's wife Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and Iscah. Now Sarai was barren. She had no children.

Terah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai 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.

[3 : 03] But when they came to Haran, they settled there. The days of Terah were 205 years, and Terah died in Haran. 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. 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. Verse 4.

So Abram went as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was 75 years old when he departed from Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran. And they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Morah. At that time, the Canaanites were in the land. Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, To your offspring I will give this land. So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent with Bethel on the west, and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord. And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negev. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's Word. Our Father in heaven, we thank you again that you have given us your Word, not just in the New Testament, but in the Old Testament. And we ask that you would help us this morning to see your plan from the beginning of time, and that you would most of all set our eyes on Jesus, that we would see him as more beautiful and more glorious than we realized, that we would worship him, that we would serve him, that we would love him. We tell you this morning that we do love you, but we need your help, and so we ask that you would speak to us clearly in your Word. And we ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

So we've skipped a lot of territory since we left off in Genesis chapter 3. Things only got worse and went downhill after Adam and Eve took part in the forbidden fruit. First of all, Genesis chapter 4, the very next chapter, we had the first murder when Cain kills Abel. And then in that same chapter, the first murderer starts the first city. Things continue to get bad, though. It's not just that there's one man who's a murderer, but we see in Genesis chapter 6 through 8 that the earth becomes so wicked that God decides he's going to wipe everything out with a flood. And so there's nothing left except for Noah and his family and two of every kind of animal. Now there's such a steep and rapid descent in the history of mankind that the flood itself is not enough. Wickedness continues. Chapter 11, we get back to mankind abandoning God. They make this claim that they're going to make a name for themselves. And so they begin to build this tower, thinking that it's going to be able to reach up to the heavens. And we see God at that point bringing his judgment on them by scattering the nations and changing their languages. We're told in Genesis chapter 11 that everyone spoke the same language until God decided they were going to speak different languages. And of course, that it destroyed their ability to work together to build this great tower. And so the point is this. As we move on from Genesis chapter 3, we saw the beginning of shame and pain in the world. The story gets darker and darker.

It gets more and more bleak. And so that's where we're at when we come here to chapters 11 and 12. You'll remember our paradigm from chapter 3 that there are these two offspring that are going to be battling it out. And there's a promise that one offspring is going to crush the other. And so I mentioned earlier, chapter 3, verse 15, this promise, or I guess a threat given to the serpent, he shall bruise your head, you shall bruise his heel. There's going to be two seeds that are going to compete against each other. One is going to win. One's going to be the one that bruises the head.

And so it's with that that we come to this setting, this passage here in chapter 11 and 12, and things are not looking good. So as we ended chapter 11 here, we have this background of tragedy and barrenness. First of all, we have this tragedy. Chapter 11, verse 28, Haran dies. So Terah, who's continuing this seed, he's got three sons, only one grandson. His grandson Lot, who's the son of Terah, or the son of Haran. Haran dies, so he has only two sons and one grandson. So there's that tragedy, right? It's supposed to be sons who bury their fathers, not fathers who bury their sons. But to make things even worse, we find out here that Sarai, verse 30, is barren. And so as we're hoping that there's going to be this offspring, this seed that's going to crush the head of the serpent, things are not looking good. Things are not looking good for the family of Terah, and things are not looking good for humanity. We have this picture here of frailty and wickedness. That's the background we're given here in chapter 11, frailty and wickedness. That shouldn't surprise us, though, because Advent is about light in the darkness. That's what we looked at last week with our lighting of the Advent candle,

[8 : 45] Isaiah chapter 9. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has a light shown. And so our pattern that we saw in chapter 3 continues here in chapter 12, which is this. God still shows up as the light in the darkness. God still shows up as the light in the darkness. In this background of wickedness and human frailty, God has not given up on his promise. As things look bleak, he continues to show up and pursue his people. And so we see at the beginning of chapter 12 these promises that he makes to Abram. First, verse 1, he tells him to leave his country. And in verse 2, because of that, he's going to make him a great nation. And so we're supposed to feel the dissonance right away. His wife can't have children. God's going to make a great nation out of him. Okay? Then he continues, though, verse 3, in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

And so we have this impossible scenario, this impossible situation where God has promised that he's going to bring his redemption to bear on the earth through a seed, and yet all evidence would be given to the contrary. This man, Terah, is not able to generate the offspring that he might like.

His son has died. And the man that we're encountering here, who's promised to become a great nation, his wife, is not able to have children. It's against that backdrop that God shows up making this great and seemingly foolish promise to Abraham. Not only are you going to have many children, but you're going to become a great nation. And not only are you going to become a great nation, that nation is going to bless the entire world. You and your wife who can't have kids are going to affect the entire globe with your offspring. Now, if we're familiar with the story of the Bible, we just need to pause for a second and think about how ridiculous that is. Ridiculous first in the sense that he's going to have lots of children.

Ridiculous second in the sense that they're going to affect the entire world. This world that's been scattered. Remember, people are speaking different languages now. They're not able to communicate with each other. And somehow, Abraham's line is going to be able to break through to that. Now, if we're Abram here... By the way, I'm using Abram and Abraham interchangeably, and I'm going to keep doing that because if you know the story, you know his name gets changed in Genesis chapter 17. Fun Cheyenne Mountain Trivia Fact, I preached on Genesis chapter 17 in April of 2017 when I came to candidate many, many years ago.

So, I did preach to you on that, but very few of you were here back then. Anyway, his name gets changed, right? So, if I say Abraham or Abram, same person. This is the promise that's been made to him. He would not have understood in what sense he was going to be a blessing to the entire nations. Some of the people reading the Old Testament before the time of Christ would not have understood exactly in what sense this person was going to be a blessing to the entire nations. Brothers and sisters, we know this morning exactly in what sense this offspring of Abraham is going to be a blessing to the entire nations. And the reason that we know it is not just because of the time of history that we live in, but because the Apostle Paul spells it out for us clearly and directly. So, I'm going to invite you to turn with me in your worship guide to page 4. We read from Galatians chapter 3 where Paul explains to us exactly what is going on in Genesis and the exact way in which Abraham's seed is going to be a blessing to the nations. And so, track with me then here. Look at verse 8 first. The Scriptures foresee that God would justify the Gentiles by faith. Gentiles being a word here that means people who aren't Jews.

[12 : 45] When God chooses Abraham, He chooses a people. Throughout the Old Testament, what we see is God being gracious to the Jewish nation. However, the plan was always that it would extend to all the nations of the earth. And so, here's the plan given us. Verse 8, He would justify the Gentiles. He would take people who are not Jews and He would save them. Then we're told that God preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham saying, in you shall all the nations be blessed. And so, we know clearly what it means here in Genesis chapter 12 that all the nations would be blessed. It's a way of God telling Abraham about the gospel. In other words, He is giving them the good news that even though humanity is caught up in this scheme of wickedness that we've seen in the preceding chapters of Genesis, God has not given up on His creation or His people. He is going to come and He's going to provide them salvation by a Redeemer, sending His Son, Jesus Christ, who's going to do a few important things.

First, He's going to live the perfect life that we should have lived but didn't. Second, He's going to die the death that we deserve to die on our behalf. In that sense, He is the blessing to the nations. And in that sense, God preached the gospel to Abraham. In other words, Abraham did not see clearly what we do now, which was that His seed that was going to crush the head of the serpent was going to come as one man, a person, Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ, in His death and His resurrection, is going to destroy evil and wickedness forever. That is everything that was contained in these words when God spoke to Abraham. Abraham did not fully understand it. We now do.

At the risk of being too obvious, the point is this. Jesus is the blessing to the nations. Jesus is the one who brings this salvation, not just for the Jews, but for everyone. We're given this passage, this promise against the backdrop of seeing how bad the world is. We looked at some of this last week. It's so bad that God had to purge the entire earth with a flood. It's so bad that all of mankind was united in rebellion against God, and He had to change their languages to confuse them.

It is so bad that it's filled with the kind of tragedy that we saw at the end of chapter 11, that the fathers bury their sons rather than the sons burying their fathers.

It is in that that there is only one kind of hope for God's people and for humanity. It is supernatural, divine intervention to come and save the world. And so that's what we see in verse 9 here of Galatians 3.

[15 : 35] So then those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. In other words, everyone who believes in Jesus Christ is included in this blessing.

That is the blessing to the nations that is promised to Abraham. That is the blessing, brothers and sisters, that brings us here together this morning. Galatians 3 tells us, it explains for us exactly what's going on here. Chapter 12, blessing to the nations. Jesus is that blessing.

Now there's sort of a cognitive dissonance we're meant to experience here as we read these words, and we know that Jesus is a blessing to the nations because what has just happened?

We've seen not a blessing of the nations, but a scattering of the nations. Remember mankind's rebellion at the Tower of Babel? God scatters them across the earth. He changes their languages. And so it seems like God is talking out both sides of His mouth here.

On the one hand, He's scattering people. On the other hand, He's pursuing them with His grace. On the one hand, He's scattering them in punishment. On the other hand, He says that He's going to bless them.

[17 : 00] How are we supposed to reconcile these things? How do we make sense of this God who's doing both at the same time? Well, the answer is we make sense of it in God's grace.

God's scattering people everywhere. He's sending grace to people everywhere. His grace looks like this. Yes, He sent the nations all over the world.

And simultaneously, at the same time, He is acting to pursue and save the nations. He has a plan, and He is executing it. This is the same thing we saw in the garden in Genesis chapter 3, as God pursued Adam and Eve as they were hiding from Him, naked and ashamed.

God continues here His constant, relentless pursuit in His grace. God, yes, brings punishment and judgment, and at the same time, He is coming to save and redeem.

What we saw in Genesis 3 is true here in Genesis 12 as well. And ultimately, we know what Paul tells us in Galatians 3, that His pursuit of them culminates in the coming of Jesus Christ.

[18 : 10] That is why we sing, Joy to the world, the Lord has come. That is why we celebrate the season of Advent, because these two things, God's scattering of the nations and His grace that He sends out to them, make sense together when we see Jesus on the cross.

They make sense as we see Jesus, on the one hand, receiving the judgments that the nations deserve, and on the other hand, providing the grace that is needed to save people of every language, nation, tribe, and tongue, every language that God created at the Tower of Babel.

They make sense there. They make sense as we see Jesus coming as a baby in a manger. They make sense as we see Jesus living His life, as we've looked at in Mark. And they make sense as we see Jesus die and rise again from the dead.

That is where we see the scattering and the grace come together. And so, brothers and sisters, we are here together this morning because of God's promise to Abraham to bless the nations.

That is why God has brought this group of people together right now on December 5th, 2021. Few, if any of us, are Jews.

[19 : 26] We're different people. We come from a variety of countries. For some of us, English is our first language. For others of us, English is not our first language.

We are here together because God promised to Abraham to bless the nations. And so, He brings that type of people together every Sunday around the world.

There was a trend on Twitter that started in September of 2020. And the trend was called How It Started, How It's Going.

And people would post these pictures side by side to show how something had progressed over time. So, you'd see things like this. If someone switched political candidates, they'd have a picture of them wearing the shirt for one candidate, how it started, how it's going.

On the other side, they'd be wearing a shirt for the other candidate that they switched to. Some people would do it for their fitness journeys. They'd show a picture of them out of shape, how it started. And they'd have a picture of them looking in amazing shape, ripped, how it's going.

[20 : 40] Some people might have a puppy picture, how it started. And you have a full-grown dog picture, how it's going. This trend, however, focused and started with romantic stories.

And so, most often, what you would see is this, how it started. The first time someone slipped into someone else's direct messages, the first time they texted them, how it's going, a picture of them at their wedding.

You might see how it started, a picture of them at their wedding, how it's going, a picture of them with their nine kids. Okay? You might see a first date picture, and then them with their family and all their pets.

The point is to show that there's these things that have changed over time. We have things that start small and go big. As we look at Genesis chapter 12, we get to see how it started, and we know how it's going.

Okay? How it started, there's a 75-year-old man who has an infertile wife who's also his sister. Think about that.

[21 : 44] Okay? How it started. I'm going to say that again. You have a 75-year-old man with an infertile wife who's also his sister. How it's going, there's estimated 2.5 billion Christians around the world today, more than any other world religion.

How it started, in the desert of the ancient Near East. How it's going, all around the world. By the way, the ancient Near East is not the geographic base of Christianity anymore.

The geographic base of Christianity is now the global south. How it started. Abraham abandoning his homeland, becoming a nomad, picking up all his possessions, and leaving everything that he knew.

Some of you, by the way, know something about that. How it's going. Jesus promised that his people will inherit the earth. How it started.

Jesus called to Abraham to give up everything and leave his homeland. How it's going. Jesus called to us that we've seen in the Gospel of Mark to follow me.

[22 : 53] In other words, we see now how much power God has. We see what Abraham could only hope in by faith.

that God was going to spread his grace around the entire world. We know and understand the plan that God had in a way that Abraham could only guess at, that he was going to send his one and only son as a sacrifice.

And how did we get from how it started to how it's going? We got there because Jesus is the one who has come and he is the one who is coming. We got there because Jesus is the one who comes and fulfills and completes the promise.

We got there because he is going to heal the world far as the curse is found. We got here because Jesus came for the salvation of the world.

That is why we're able to look at Genesis 12 and say how it started and look at what God has given us here this morning at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church and the fellowship that we have with Christians around the world and throughout time and say this is how it's going.

[24 : 09] That is what we celebrate here at Advent. The promise from Habakkuk 2 we begin to see how it's going to happen. The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Jesus is the one who comes as the blessing to the nations. and he comes unlike any other religion not tied to a geographic place but someone who's come for the whole world.

In his book on Mark called Jesus the King Tim Keller talks about this reality of Christianity being a worldwide religion and he tells about an interview with a man named Andrew Wells who noted that wherever the other great world religions began that is still their center today.

Islam started in Arabia at Mecca and the Middle East is still the center of Islam today. Buddhism started in the Far East and that's still the center of Buddhism. So too with Hinduism.

Christianity is the exception. Christianity's center is always moving always on a pilgrimage. He listed it was in Jerusalem at one point it moved to the Hellenistic and Mediterranean world then for a while the center of Christianity was in Northern Europe.

[25 : 32] In the 20th century North America became the center. Meanwhile in Latin America Asia and Africa it has been growing at up to 10 times the population growth rate.

In the past decade it has returned more than 50% of Christians in the world now live in the southern hemisphere. And we're not surprised because Jesus has come as the blessing to the nations.

In the year 1900 Africa was only 1% Christian. Now Christians make up nearly half the African population. In the next 50 to 70 years the center of Christianity is predicted to complete this shift away from European countries and from the United States.

It will migrate as it always migrates. Jesus truly is the blessing to the nations. He is the one who has come for every people place tribe and tongue and nation.

He is the fulfillment of this promise to Abraham. And so how do we respond to him? What do we do with a God who has come for people who speak every language?

[26 : 53] Well we do what Abraham models for us here. We answer his call to follow him. Abraham experiences tremendous loss here. He gives up his family.

He gives up the place that he's known. He gives up permanence. And instead he takes on this nomadic life. And he does it by the way with a bleak picture with bad odds.

everything would say that Abraham is headed into failure. Everything would predict that this is a bad idea and yet God's promise here is that he's going to provide for them what no one else can.

The hope of those at the Tower of Babel is that they would make a name for themselves. God tells Abraham here verse 2 I will make your name great.

I am going to be the one who fulfills your greatest hopes and dreams. And it's been pointed out here that God's I wills in this passage far outstrip and eclipse anything he asks of Abram.

[28 : 01] Abram is just told go and then we see this list of I wills. The land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation. I will bless you. You will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you.

I will curse and you all the families of the earth will be blessed. God always empowers and enables what he commands. God always gives all the resources for what he has called us to do.

God always bankrolls our obedience with his promises. True for Abraham and true for us as well. We see his blessing to the nations and so we follow him and we trust him.

people are often fascinated by founding stories especially when those founding stories show something small becoming something great and so one of the most famous ones is Apple computers starting in this garage with a pirate flag flying on the wall back in 1976.

Now what most people don't remember is that there weren't just two founders to Apple. There were three founders. founders. The third founder was this man named Ronald Wayne and less than two weeks after the founding of Apple Ronald decided that he wanted to pull out and so he sold his 10% share in the company for a grand whopping total of \$800.

[29 : 28] It's estimated that in 2013 10% of Apple would have been worth \$35 billion. million. Now maybe he thought it was a bleak picture and bad odds to be a part of a computer company that was starting in a garage with a pirate flag on the wall.

At the end of 2020 Apple was worth \$65.34 billion. Small to big in a way that would have been hard, maybe impossible to imagine at the time.

Brothers and sisters, in this passage in Genesis chapter 12, we get to see the greatest founding story of all time. Something that makes \$65 billion look incredibly small.

when we celebrate Advent, we are celebrating that something much greater and more glorious and more powerful than Apple stock is here. In fact, we see something that is meant to be a blessing to the entire nations, not providing wonderful electronic experiences, but providing salvation and redemption, reconciliation in our relationship with God, and therefore our reconciliation with one another, knowing that God is coming to wipe every tear away from our eyes and restore and remake this world better than it has ever been in the past, that he has come to heal and redeem and restore.

And we have the chance to take part in that now, like Abraham, following God's call, because we have seen his power.

[31 : 15] We see a world of wickedness where the nations are scattered, and we see that God continues to pursue, offering his blessing to every single one of them.

Jesus is the one who has come as the blessing for you and for me. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we thank you for the glorious and wonderful work that you have done in our lives and that you do around the world.

We thank you that you have come not for people who just speak one language, but people who speak every language. We thank you that you haven't come just for one country, but you've come for every country.

We thank you that you've given us hope and confidence in you as we see your power at work in a way that it is not visible anywhere else, that we know that you are the one and true God.

We ask that you would use that truth to encourage us and challenge us and change us. And we ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ.