

March 16, 2014
Lent 2

"God's Amazing Grace to Abraham and to Us"

GENESIS 12:1-8

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. ² "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. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." ⁴ So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. ⁵ He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. ⁶ Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷ The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring {⁷ Or seed} I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him. ⁸ From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.

It is truly amazing how God's grace rescues people and fills their lives with multiple blessings. That certainly was true of Abraham. Abraham spent the first half of his life in Ur of the Chaldees and Haran surrounded by heathen people. The book of Joshua tells us that Abraham's own father Terah worshipped other gods. Then God's amazing grace called Abraham to move to another country and the Lord God filled his life with clusters of blessings and multiple promises. The Lord is still calling people out of the land of darkness and bringing them into the light of his love just as he did with Abraham. He fills their lives with blessings and then they become a blessing for other people.

Tomorrow is St Patrick's Day. How many people know that Patrick was an Englishman who was captured by the Irish at the age of sixteen and made into a slave? He spent six years watching sheep. It was there out in the field with the sheep that the Lord drew him closer to his Word and filled his life with blessings in Christ. He escaped to England and then returned to Ireland to bring the gospel to the people who once enslaved him.

God's amazing grace brought you to life in Christ when you were dead in your sin, lifeless like this stone. If I place a potato in the ground it will actually put our sprouts and grow into a potato plant. If I place a rock into the ground nothing will happen. We were lifeless like this stone until God's amazing grace made us alive in Christ. He brings clusters of blessings into your life just as he did with Abraham. Let's take a closer look at the God's amazing grace to Abraham and also to us.

Amazing grace brings blessings to us

Abraham was truly blessed to have the Lord speak to him. "The Lord had said to Abraham, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's house and go to the land I will show

you.” The Hebrew word for “Leave” is actually a doubling of the same word. When a fast moving fire storm sweeps down the mountains to the houses below, the fire department urgently pleads with people to get out of the homes and away from the flames. The Lord wanted Abraham to leave the land of idolatry where he was leaving. He wanted him to leave his people and his father’s house.

It is amazing how God’s Word changed Abraham’s life. Verse 4 says that he left as the Lord had told him. Please, dear Christian, don’t underestimate the power of God’s Word to change your life. Jesus said, “My words are spirit and they are life.” So we wake up each day living in the hope and anticipation that the Word of the Lord that we have come to know and love will alter and change our lives and give us life. Mostly we want that Word to bring us closer to Jesus and the love that he has for us.

Listen to the life changing promises given to Abraham. “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.” The Lord says, “I will...I will...I will.” The Lord does not say, “Abraham, do your part and then I will bless you.” No, the Lord simply says, “I will make you into a great nation and bless you.” Even though he is 75 years old and his wife Sarah is 65 years old and they have no children, the Lord promises he will have a son and a great nation will come from him. Even though it would take twenty five long years, the Lord came through and kept his promise. The Lord always keeps his promises even though it may require us to wait on the Lord.

Look at the cluster of blessings. The Lord says, “I will bless you and make your name great, and you will be a blessing.” Abraham was a wealthy man when he left Haran. The Lord made him even wealthier with the promise, “I will bless you and make your name great.” When five evil kings attacked the people near Abraham, he was able to muster a small army of over 300 men from his many servants. They attacked the kings and brought the people home. If strangers were passing through, they always found a warm welcome in the tents of Abraham. He was a blessing to other people wherever he went.

You may not possess the material blessings that Abraham enjoyed but you can sure look back at your life and see clusters of blessings poured out for you. You can even see how he used you in different ways to be a blessing to other. In a few minutes the choir will sing, “10000 Reasons” a song that calls on us to bless the Lord for all his benefits as we say in Psalm 103, “Bless the Lord O my soul, and forget now all his benefits.”

All of these promises were preliminary to the great promise, “And all the peoples of the earth will be blessed through you.” Picture a crown festooned with expensive jewels of all colors and sizes, but in the center of the crown is a massive diamond. This is the promise of the Messiah to come. “All nations will be blessed through you.” Your whole life, your whole hope and everything you are hinges on that descendant promised to Abraham. In his excellent commentary on Genesis Martin Luther wrote, “This is a promise which should be written in golden letters and should be extolled in the languages of all people, for it offers the eternal treasures.”

What eternal treasures we have in Jesus. Jesus was born in the land God promised to Abraham. This amazing descendant from Abraham is God’s Son from all eternity, the

Word made flesh. The angel Gabriel told Mary she would give birth to a son whose name would be Jesus, the Son of the Most High God. Mary and Joseph watched this child grow up in their home and they marveled at the kindness and love he showed to them and everyone he met. John the Baptist pointed to him, this descendant of Abraham, this Jewish carpenter from Nazareth as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The prophet Isaiah predicted the coming a Servant who be pierced for our transgression and crushed for our iniquities. When Jesus finished dying on the cross and paying for the sins of the world he cried out from the cross, "It is finished." He wanted the whole world to hear that they are blessed with this treasure of knowing their sin is forgiven.

Without the treasures or blessings which only Jesus can bring, the whole world is still living under the curse of the law. Paul writes in Galatians 3, "All who rely on observing the law are under a curse for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.'" It isn't just the gang members who are under the curse of the law, or a young woman like Miley Cyrus who sticks out her evil tongue at anything and everyone. It is the good people in this community who also fall short of God's glory because they are not able to keep God's laws perfectly. Romans 3 speaks of this curse in this way, "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands or seeks God." Galatians 3 says, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us." His death on the cross is the only way the curse of sin can be removed for me and for every person living on this earth.

The question is often asked: "How were all those people like Abraham, and Adam and others in the Old Testament saved if Jesus had not yet come into the world?" Genesis 15:6 says, "Abraham believed and it was credited to him as righteousness." By believing in the promise of a Savior, Abraham and other Old Testament believers were credited with what Christ would do, just as you are credited with what Christ has done. By a miracle of God's grace everything Christ has done has been credited or transferred or placed into your account. Through Jesus every nasty thing you have done this week has been expunged from your book and into that book is the blessing of Jesus perfect life.

Amazing grace uses us to bring blessings to others

What further amazes us about God's grace is the way he uses us to bring these treasures we have in Christ to other people. Abraham came to the land of Canaan. You may have a mental picture of Abraham entering into a broad and barren desert region that was devoid of people. Archaeologists have uncovered substantial cities that once existed in this area. The Canaanites were intelligent and artistic, but also engaged in filthy fertility worship that also included sacrificing their own children. Abraham did not hesitate to proclaim his blessings in Christ to them.

"Abraham traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree Moreh at Shechem." It was there that Abraham built an altar and called on the name of the Lord. He did not call on the names of the gods of his father Terah or the gods of the Canaanites. He called on the name of the Lord, the true God who had spoken to him and promised him the blessing of a Savior. Abraham was not ashamed to talk about the Lord to anyone who would listen. He was not afraid to call on the name of the Lord in full view of the Canaanites who were in the land.

You have heard it said, "Bloom where you are planted." The Lord has chosen you from all eternity to be planted in the blessings in Christ. Ephesians 1 says, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." 1 Peter 1 says "You know that it was not with perishable things that you were redeemed...but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect." What a privilege it is to bloom where we have been planted in Christ by God's grace. 1 Peter 2 says, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." Then it goes on to say, "Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."

The prayer of Patrick of Ireland is our prayer as we give glory to God's amazing grace for the blessings we have in Christ. "Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me, Christ in the eye that sees me, Christ in the ear that hears me." It is truly amazing how God's grace has given these blessings in Christ to you and then he uses you to bring these blessings to others. Amen.