

Genesis 12:1-3

Restoring Blessedness

When you think of being blessed what is the first thing that you think of? How many of you would consider yourself blessed? How many of you want more of a blessing? Often time's blessedness is associated with materialism, but there is a blessedness that is far beyond anything that money can buy. Listen to the words of our LORD in Matthew 16: *For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?* There are many who might consider themselves blessed because of something that they have gained, but the Bible tells us that we are blessed because of what has been given to us - life through faith in the Son.

I read a story the other day about a 47 story skyscraper in Spain. Spain's economy has been struggling for a while and this skyscraper stretching 47 stories into the air was supposed to be a symbol of their prosperity, to show the world they are climbing out of the financial hole. There was only one problem with this skyscraper, there was no way up. The builders forgot the elevator shaft.

The Bible tells the story for true blessedness, and true blessedness is life. The living that most people consider living is not living if it is outside of God. This is our message to the world, a message of blessedness through faith in the God who so loved us that he sent his only begotten Son so that whoever believes may have eternal life, whoever believes may be blessed.

At Oxford we have been studying Matthew and for this Advent season we are taking the first chapter of Matthew to show how God had been preparing the world for the arrival of King Jesus. Last week we looked at the creation account and this week we move ahead to look at the next major movement for our purposes - God's Covenant with Abraham.

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Did you notice how many times the word bless was repeated. God wants us to know something. He wants us to know that he intends to bless the entire world in a certain way - through a man. But pay close attention, if God intends to bless through a man that means that by the time we get to Abraham the world does not have the blessing of God.

We have heard the word blessed before. Remember Genesis 1:28 - God blessed the first couple and told them to be fruitful and multiply and have dominion. But the story is that they did not obey God and instead of acting in his blessing they chose to disregard his ways which resulted in cursing. Let look at it quickly in Genesis 3 beginning in verse 14. Look at all the curses that are pronounced because of disobedience. But in the midst of all the curses look at Genesis 15. Things are disastrous but God's grace is greater and he marks a way for what was lost to be restored. The way for blessing to be restored is through one who would be born of a woman.

Which brings us to our first point this morning:

1. God's Grace is Greater Than Man's Sinfulness

Man's fall from the grace of God was a radical fall. Man who was intended to have fellowship with God, who was intended to fill the earth with the purpose of God traded their crown for chains. Tulips were traded for thorns and thistles, and man who was created for life tasted the bitterness of death. Sin spread through mankind like a plague and it isn't long until we see one of the children of Adam and Eve kill his own brother. Cain killed Abel, the intentions of the hearts of man was evil continually so God had to step down to the earth he created to judge it by causing a flood to cover the earth, killing almost everything that lived.

But undergirding this story is a current of grace. God saw the whole picture when he said the world was good, knew the heartache that would come from the disaster of sin, and still chose to look at the works of his hands and say that it was good. God's plan for man would be fulfilled and he set out to restore the earth that he created to its state of blessedness. God deals with individuals and through individuals he brings about his plan to redeem. By the time we get to Abraham we see God continuing what he already promised to do - bless the world. Let's look closer into the life of Abraham. I want to show you the undercurrent of grace.

Adam and Eve had three sons: Cain, Abel, and Seth. Cain killed Abel and Seth had a son named Enosh. The son of Seth is important because Genesis 4:26 says, *At that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD*. Seth was the 6th Great Granddaddy of a guy you are probably familiar with - Noah.

Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Don't forget who Noah was. Noah was the one from whom the cursed ground was suppose to receive relief (Gen. 5:28-32). What was God doing by saving Noah and his family in the Ark? Keeping hope alive, keeping the hope of blessedness alive through preserving Noah. All the nations the earth can trace their lineage back to the three sons of Noah.

Shem was the 8th Great Granddaddy of Abraham.

Abraham's daddy, a son of Shem, had three sons: Abram, Nahor, and Haran. And its here that we pick up our story. Why is all of this important? God has a relentless pursuit of his glory. The people were lost, scattered, but God had a plan. His grace is greater than our sin. Aren't you glad of this? Romans 5 says it this way, *Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more*. God has made up his mind that he will never stop loving us. He created the world so that we would enjoy fellowship with him and whatever he sets out to do he will do, his purposes will come about.

This is good news: God was determined to save and he will save - there is nothing that you and I can do about it. He will receive honor and glory from every tribe, every tongue, and every people. He will fill the earth with those who worship and obey him. The earth will be filled with the knowledge of him as the waters cover the sea. You may fail but he never fails. His grace is greater and so he calls an idol worshiper named Abram in a foreign land and tells him his plan to use him to bless the whole world. Only God could do this. We get to be the benefactors of his love.

2. God's Grace Calls Men To Respond

Abraham did not seek God, God came seeking him. The grace of God found the restless heart of Abraham and called him to follow him. The message that he told Abraham was really too good to be true. Think about it. God simply called Abraham to go. He didn't tell him where, he just told him to go and he would show him. He did tell him what would happen as a result of his obedience - blessing.

The whole story is filled with suspense. Here God calls him to go, but doesn't tell him where to go. Then he tells him that he is going to be a great nation, but before we even get to Abraham's call in Genesis 12 we learn that Abraham's wife, Sarah is barren. Everything is unbelievable. Abraham struggles with this. One of my favorite moments is in Genesis 15. Constantly in the story of Abraham God comes and deals gently with his servant. God remembers that Abraham is but dust, but He's God, he can make whatever he wants with or without the dust. In Genesis 15 Abraham and God are having a conversation and it's almost as if Abraham is a little agitated, but God assures him by telling him to number the stars.

The whole thing sound unbelievable but if you think about it everything that we hold dear as Christians seems unbelievable. To believe that the dead will rise again. To believe that one day a King is going to come and appear in the sky riding a white horse to establish his kingdom on a renewed earth. And if you don't struggle with that, some of you who believe that struggle with believing that God loves you not based upon anything that you can do but all on what Jesus has done for us on the Cross.

Listen, the Bible is a book of belief. A book that calls us to believe not something that we see but something that we hear. How was the world made? The Word of the Lord. What did Adam and Eve have to do to fulfill their purpose? If they would have listened they would have lived. What does Abraham have to do? Listen, believe, and obey. What do you have to do to receive eternal life? You have to respond to God by believing what he has said.

You see what God is doing through Abraham? God is setting the world back on track. He is reordering the world that went astray through unbelief by belief. Listen to how Paul interpret this in Romans 4. *That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.*

(Romans 4:16-17 ESV)

This is why Jesus has come. He has come that we may believe on him and in believing in him have life. Listen closely, Jesus is the way the world is blessed. If I were to ask you who was the son of Abraham. Many of you might say Isaac. And you would be partly right. Listen to the way that Matthew tells the story. Matthew 1:1, *The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.*

Jesus is the way the world is blessed. Jesus comes as the promised savior to restore blessedness to the world. If we were to flip through to the end of the story of Abraham we would read these words: *These are the days of the years of Abraham's life, 175 years. Abraham breathed his last and died a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people.* (Genesis 25:7-8) If blessedness means life then a dead man can't give you life. But you know who can? A man who tasted death but is now alive - this is Jesus. Jesus has tasted death for all so that all who have faith in what he says will live. What does he say? Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. Believe that your situation is grave but his grace is greater. Believe that you are a terrible sinner, but he is a wonderful savior. Believe that he will save you. Won't you come to him?