

The Promises to Abraham

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We're here to study the book of Genesis 12. Two weeks ago we looked at the prominence of Abraham in the Old and New Testament and as you study the book of Genesis, you are immediately struck by how important this man is in the book of Genesis. Then as you continue on through the rest of the Pentateuch and the Old Testament and even into the New Testament, you see Abraham being mentioned repeatedly at pivotal times in the history of redemption and all we did last week was really simply highlight that and, for better or for worse, that kind of gives you an insight into how my mind works and, I guess, I teach according to the way that my mind works. I think it's important for us to see the big picture before we get down to details. Sometimes people want to get into details of a particular verse or a particular doctrine before they really have enough data available and considered and on the table in order to be able to put it in its proper perspective. This is how cults get started is that one verse will be lifted up out of its context and blown out of proportion and we want to avoid that by taking a look at the sweep of Scripture and at the sweep of a book that we're looking at and that's what we're trying to do with Abraham here. There is so much that is at stake in how you understand God's promises to Abraham and what I want to do tonight is just kind of walk through these promises and then next week we'll try to sort out the theological implications of the promises for both for now for the church and for what it means for the future, but it's not too much to say that God's dealing with Abraham is one of the central hinges of redemptive history and so it's important for us to consider it.

Why is that? Why is Abraham so important? Well, let's be clear from the start: it's not because Abraham was a self-made man who fought his way to the top; it wasn't someone who distinguished himself by his works because Abraham was a man who failed on numerous occasions. What makes Abraham distinct is the fact that God chose him and God made far reaching promises to him that are still affecting the outworking of God's redemptive plan to this very day and so we need to understand something about those promises if we're going to make sense of the Bible, if we're going to make sense of the plan of salvation, and if we are going to understand something about the future course of world history. That's how important this is.

So we're going to pick up these promises in Genesis 12 and we touched on this chapter last time but I want to go back and take a closer look. Let me read the passage one more time to set it in our minds once and for all, "Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go forth

from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you." And we said that part of the aspect of God's call on a life is he calls us out of the world; he calls us out of our present life in order to follow him. Jesus himself said, "If any man wants to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me." We're not intended to follow God and carry along all of the baggage that we've brought along the way, we're meant to leave the baggage behind, to drop it where it is and go and follow God and go in the New Testament times, go and follow Christ. And we said and we recognized, and many of us have experienced this, some of you very painfully, that sometimes this means that we separate; it results in a cleavage, in a separation even from those that previously were closest to us. The ones who once loved us and were happy to walk with us now curse our names for some of us and that's not an easy situation. But what you see here in Genesis 12, you see God calling out Abram, you're seeing that right from the very foundation of redemptive history, that that principle of separation from family and country is something that is central to the very nature of the call and so it shouldn't surprise us when we meet with opposition. It shouldn't surprise us when people who once were our friends are now alienated and hostile toward us. This is the nature of what it means to be called out by God and to follow him in a world that rebels against him. If you think about it, if you think about it at all, you'd realize that it would have to be the case. If salvation truly is a call out of the world and if the world is hostile and in rebellion to God, if we align ourselves with that God, if we line ourselves with that Christ, we should expect that the hostility that the world is always directing toward God is suddenly directed toward us as well. Jesus said, "If they persecute me, they will persecute you also." So the fact that there is hostility in some of your family relationships based on your faith in Christ is not a sign that you're doing something wrong, it's a sign that the spiritual life in you is real, and so we are encouraged by that even though we are saddened by the loss of the human relationship.

Well, going back to verse 2, God starts to lay out these promises and this is what we're really going to look at for the rest of our time together this evening in verses 2 and 3. He says, "I will make you a great nation," and there's really seven promises here that are in these three verses. We're going to look at them one by one. 1. I will make you a great nation. 2. I will bless you. 3. I will make your name great. 4. You shall be a blessing. 5. I will bless those who bless you. 6. The one who curses you I will curse. 7. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed. God here is calling Abram out of paganism to be his chosen recipient of vast blessing, blessings that are continuing four millennia now since they were first made. And he makes these seven promises to Abram and he says that, "I am setting in motion a plan to bless the entire world through you." So the magnitude of this, the magnitude of what we are reading is betrayed by the simplicity and the shortness of the words that are used to express it but look there at the end of verse 3, how broad, how vast what God is saying here is, "in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." This is vast and comprehensive that extends far beyond Abraham in its implications.

What did God promise? Let's just unpack it a little bit one by one. First of all, a great nation. God promises to bring a great nation out of Abraham there in verse 2. He says, "I will make you a great nation." And as you read through the rest of the Bible, you see that

God fulfilled that promise. The nation of the Jews who descended from Abram did become great; they became a numerically great people in Egypt, so much so that they were a threat to Pharaoh and he had to oppress them in order to keep them in subjugation. They became a politically great people under King David and Solomon in the years that followed. And the true greatness of that line of Abram is found in the fact that redemption comes through that nation. As we said last time, two weeks ago, we received the Scriptures from the Jews. Jesus Christ, the only Savior of the world, was a descendant of Abraham. No other ethnic group can make such a claim. No other ethnic group can claim to be true recipients of the revelation of God. No other ethnic group can claim to be the one that gave birth to the Messiah through a woman, not through the seed of a man. But there you have it, a great nation, a numerically great nation, a politically great nation, although they squandered their opportunity in sin, and a redemptively great nation. So God promises to make Abram a great nation and we see multiple ways in which that was fulfilled. So there's the first aspect of it and we'll look at this more a little bit next week as well when we talk about the consequences of these promises; right now I just want you to see them in an overview fashion.

Well, what else did God promise Abraham or Abram, we're going to use that interchangeably. His new name Abraham hasn't been given to him yet but I'll sometimes slip and refer to him that way. In verse 2, we see, secondly, that God promises a great blessing to him. He says simply, "I will bless you," and God kept this promise as well. Abraham met with material success. Look over at chapter 13, verse 1, "Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, he and his wife and all that belonged to him, and Lot with him." And in verse 2, "Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold." So materially speaking, God blessed Abram. And then beyond that, God blessed him spiritually as well. Look at chapter 15, verse 1, "After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, 'Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great.'" So God is repeating his promise to bless him and to give him a great reward. And how did this play out? Verse 2, "Abram said, 'O Lord GOD, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?' And Abram said, 'Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir.' Then behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, 'This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.' And He took him outside and said, 'Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.' And He said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.'" Verse 6, "Then he believed in the LORD; and He," meaning God, "reckoned it to him as righteousness." Abraham was declared righteous, he was justified by faith in the promise of God. So here he is, he's a very rich man, he is promised a very great realm of descendants and on top of that, God brings him to spiritual salvation and this pagan is now seen as righteous in the presence of God. How greatly blessed he is just as you get to Genesis 15, and then as you continue reading on in the rest of the Scripture and you see his descendants multiply and his name remembered, even to this day we're talking about him in recognition of what Scripture says and how he has been blessed, we see this great blessing that God has poured out on this man.

Now, to just step back from that and to have a little sense of perspective on it, you start to realize and this starts to call your attention to the fact that, "Okay, this is someone in Scripture that I need to pay attention to." This is someone that needs to be followed and see how God follows through on this because God's promises to Abraham did not die when Abraham did. God was looking beyond Abraham when he was making these promises to him, wasn't he? When he says, "I'm going to give you multiplied descendants," when he says, "I'm going to make a great nation of you," he was looking beyond the life of Abraham when he was promising this blessing. So we start to see some aspects about the nature of God and the plan of God in that as you read the Scriptures, we should be understanding and reading it from a perspective that God had a plan that he was working out. God was not a responder to human developments as the open theist would try to have us say and God is kind of learning as we are as events unfold. God had a plan in advance and when he told Abraham, "I'm going to bless you," he already knew what he was going to do. He knew the end from the beginning. And so we see this unfolding and we realize the sovereign power of God to keep his promises and so we are drawn to this passage in Genesis 12 and say, "Here's the beginning of something great. Let's trace it through redemptive history." And that's what we're going to do this week and next week.

So a great nation, a great blessing, look at verse 2 again, we come, thirdly, to the fact that God says, "I will make your name great." How great is Abraham's name? Well, look at Genesis 26:24. What does God himself say about this man? Here he is speaking to Isaac in Genesis 26, "The LORD appeared to Isaac the same night and said, 'I am the God of your father Abraham; Do not fear, for I am with you. I will bless you, and multiply your descendants, For the sake of My servant Abraham.'" God affirms the name of Abraham to his son and declares him to be his servant. There is a special sense, a special recognition of the name of Abraham. As God speaks and continues the promises to Isaac, he says, "This man Abraham was my servant."

But there's more to it than that as you read through the rest of the Scriptures. Turn over to 2 Chronicles 20, if you would, verse 7 where King Jehoshaphat is praying, and let's start in verse 6, he says, "O LORD, the God of our fathers, are You not God in the heavens? And are You not ruler over all the kingdoms of the nations? Power and might are in Your hand so that no one can stand before You. Did You not, O our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel and give it to the descendants of Abraham," here it is, "Your friend?" Abraham is called the friend of God. He's called the servant of God. What a distinguished position for him to have in the course of revelation to be recognized in this way.

Look over at the prophet Isaiah in chapter 41, verse 8, where you see this term used again. God is speaking now and we'll read a couple of extra verses because the context is encouraging to us. God here now is promising coming redemption to Israel, kind of an echo of what we looked at on this past Sunday, two days ago. He says in verse 8, "you, Israel, My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, Descendant of Abraham My friend." If you're a true Christian, you would love to know that God thought of you in that manner,

to have God declare you to be his friend. And so Abraham is distinguished as being the friend of God. What a great name given to this man.

Verse 9 as God continues to speak to the nation, "You whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, And called from its remotest parts And said to you, 'You are My servant, I have chosen you and not rejected you. Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.'" That was one of the first verses that I ever memorized as a Christian. A friend sent me a card with that verse on the front and I was, as a new Christian every Bible verse is new and I had never heard that verse before and it always stuck with me since then. Here's what I want you to see as a result of it, though, is that flowing out of, where that promise flows from, this promise that God makes to his nation Israel, is traced back to the fact that they were the seed of Abraham. They were the descendant of Abraham, my friend. God who made promises to Abraham continuing on, promises to his people, "Don't fear. I'm with you. I will strengthen you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." So you just see this great name of Abraham. God's friend and the friendship is so great that it perpetuates down through generations, again, manifesting not the greatness of Abraham but the greatness of the promise keeping God who called him.

Look over at James in the New Testament, James 2. You almost get the sense that God can't get Abraham off of his mind because he's so woven through Scripture. In verse 23, it says, James 2:23, "the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,' and he was called the friend of God." The name of Abraham is set apart in Scripture. He's called God's servant indicating his loyalty and his obedience to God. He's called the friend of God indicating his intimacy with God. So you see this great name given to Abraham and God has kept his promise. You know, there's another way that you can measure this as well. In the three major religions of the world today, you look at the Jews, you look at the Muslims, you look at the Christians, not to equate them in truth, but simply to acknowledge the fact that all three of those would hold Abraham in high esteem. So to this day, even in the world, his name is held in high regard by people who otherwise have very little in common. The name of Abraham is looked upon highly and obviously we're just kind of surveying this very quickly. God promises a great nation from Abraham, he promises a great blessing to Abraham, and he promises a great name for Abraham. So there are just blessings and promises abounding everywhere as you consider what God said to Abram in Genesis 12.

Let's go back there now and look at a fourth aspect of the promises. A great nation, a great blessing, a great name, look at what it says here at the end of verse 2 now when he says, "And so you shall be a blessing." Fourth promise, you shall be a blessing. It's not just that Abraham was going to be a receptacle, a receiver of the blessing of God, God was going to communicate blessing to others through the life of Abraham. How distinct, how set apart he was to be used by God. The Hebrew here at the end of verse 2 is also translated, can also be translated as an imperative, you be a blessing. The point is that God blessed Abraham so that he would be a conduit of blessing to others as well.

So where do we see this? Look over at Genesis 14, just seeing this played out in the life of Abraham. In Genesis 14, there is a war among kings and Lot, Abram's nephew, is taken captive in verse 12. He and his possessions were taken captive and then in verse 13, "a fugitive came and told Abram the Hebrew. Now he was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and brother of Aner, and these were allies with Abram. When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he led out his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. He divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them, and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus. He brought back all the goods, and also brought back his relative Lot with his possessions, and also the women, and the people." So Lot is captive. Abram becomes a source of blessing by delivering him from that captivity.

Turn over to Genesis 21. As you know, Sarah his wife is barren, and yet through Abram she is given a son. Genesis 21:1, "Then the LORD took note of Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had promised. So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac. Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. Sarah said, 'God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.' And she said, 'Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.'" Sarah who was barren was joyful and full of laughter because she had the child that had been withheld from her, coming through the loins of Abraham. So Abraham is a blessing to his family. He's a blessing to his nephew. And he makes provision even to find a wife for his son Isaac in Genesis 24. We won't bother to turn there. You remember how he sent out one of his servants and the servant went and found a bride for Isaac.

But it goes beyond that, it goes beyond his immediate family. Turn to Hebrews 11, let's say. We could go to a couple of different places, but in Hebrews 11, we see that Abraham is a blessing even to us today because in the New Testament where, not here in Hebrews 11 but elsewhere in Scripture, it says that the things that were written in former times were written for our instruction so that through the encouragement of Scripture we might have hope, that's in Romans 15. Well, here in Hebrews 11, you see the writer of Hebrews giving encouragement to the New Testament saint saying, "Look back at how the people of the Old Testament walked and find instruction, find encouragement for your own walk of faith." So he says in Hebrews 11:8, he says, "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God." And it talks about Sarah in verses 11 and 12, actually, turn to verse 12, "Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore."

So you see Scripture using Abraham to instruct us in the New Testament era, you see what happened to Abraham when he obeyed God and went out not knowing where he was going. Look at the way that God blessed him and multiplied the goodness and the graciousness that he showed in his life in ways that Abraham never could have calculated. He says there is abundant blessing in obeying God by faith. And the point is for the New Testament saint, is that this is what we are supposed to see to look at and to be encouraged so that when we walk into times of seeming darkness, when we're not sure where obedience to God is going to lead us, when you're not sure where the providence of God is going to take you in your health, in your family, in your uncertainty of life, Scripture says one of the places you go is you look back at Abraham and see how God blessed his faithful obedience and be encouraged to realize that God, who was faithful to Abraham, will be faithful to you and so someone else has gone on this path before you. You can follow in his footsteps and be encouraged by it. The life of Abraham becomes a blessing even to us today.

Look at Hebrews 11:39, after walking through many other heroes of the faith, Hebrews 11:39 says, "And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect." The example, the life of Abraham, is still spilling over and finding the perfection of its purposes as we look to him and find encouragement for our own spiritual life. Abraham illustrates what it means to be justified by faith. Abraham illustrates what it means to be sanctified by faith. So as we read about this flesh and blood man, we find encouragement for our own walk and Abraham has become a blessing even for us.

Now, go back to Genesis 12 as we look at the fifth aspect of the promises that God made to Abraham. Genesis 12. I'll find my way back there also. He says, fifthly, look at it at the start of verse 3, he says, "I will bless those who bless you." And once again, we see the ever expanding circles of the impact that the life of Abraham has and the ever-expanding circles, better stated, of the intentions of God in the promises that he makes to Abraham. So it's not something that's merely personal to Abraham, it's not something that simply is through his genealogical line, but there are implications for people in terms of how they respond to Abraham and his descendants. God says, "I will bless those who bless you." In other words, God identifies himself with Abraham so fully that he will bless those people who deal favorably with Abraham. It will spill over to them as well.

So in Genesis 13, Lot went out with Abraham, their possessions were so great they were not able to remain together, and in Genesis 20, turn over there with me. It does fascinate me to see these things in Scripture and you start to get, what you have here in Genesis 12 and as you start to read the rest of the book of Genesis, is you start to get an interpretive key to what's happening in what you read in chapters 13 through 50. You start to see. You can trace it all back to this original source, to this fountainhead found in Genesis 12.

So Genesis 20:14, "Abimelech then took sheep and oxen and male and female servants, and gave them to Abraham, and restored his wife Sarah to him." There had been a little

confusion over exactly who Sarah was and Abimelech corrected the situation and now is bestowing favor upon Abraham. Watch what happens to Abimelech here. Verse 15, "Abimelech said, 'Behold, my land is before you; settle wherever you please.' To Sarah he said, 'Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver; behold, it is your vindication before all who are with you, and before all men you are cleared.'" This king is dealing graciously, generously, dealing well with Abraham. Watch what happens. Verse 17, "Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech and his wife and his maids, so that they bore children. For the LORD had closed fast all the wombs of the household of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife." So this man shows favor and kindness and blessing to Abraham, in response, he receives blessing from God. And as you go on and as you continue to read, you see the converse is true as well. God assigns his dealings with others based on their response to Abraham.

Go back to Genesis 12 again and we'll see the sixth aspect of these promises. A great nation, a great blessing, a great name, Abraham will be a blessing, God will bless those who bless him and now here in verse 3 we see the sixth aspect of the promise where it says, "the one who curses you I will curse." And what God says here is that those who deal badly with Abram or his descendants will be judicially cursed by God, and you see this played out even in the exodus, in the book of Exodus. You see how Pharaoh, in fact, let's turn there for a moment, Exodus 1:8 where you see how God carries this through in the promises as it applies in the descendants. Exodus 1:8, "a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. He said to his people, 'Behold, the people of the sons of Israel are more and mightier than we. Come, let us deal wisely with them, or else they will multiply and in the event of war, they will also join themselves to those who hate us, and fight against us and depart from the land.' So," verse 11, "they appointed taskmasters over them to afflict them with hard labor. And they built for Pharaoh storage cities. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and the more they spread out, so that they were in dread of the sons of Israel." And you know what happened as the story goes on, verse 13, "The Egyptians compelled the sons of Israel to labor rigorously," and on and on it goes. Well, without going into the whole story of Exodus, you know what happened and that God began to send plagues and when it was time for them to release the Israelites so that Moses would lead them out, God afflicted them with plague after plague after plague, a total of 10 plagues, and you see Egypt oppressing the Israelites and God, in turn, bringing cursing and judgment upon them, ultimately culminating in the destruction of their army at the Red Sea, culminating in the loss of their firstborn. God brought plagues and cursing upon them when they refused to let his people go. So we have this, we just see this illustrated in Scripture. The blessing on Abraham, "I will bless those who bless you. I will curse those who curse you." There is a sense of invincibility almost as the people of Israel go through in response to these promises from God.

Now, one more here and we may finish a little early tonight, but the seventh aspect of the promise, Genesis 12:3, go back there because this has long reaching implications even to the Christian church. God says, "I will bless those who bless you. The one who curses you I will curse," now number 7, "in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." Here's what we want to see and we'll pick up here next week, is for us to realize that these promises that God gives to Abraham in the first three verses of chapter 12, the ultimate

purpose of these promises go far beyond the man Abram or even beyond his descendants; that what we see here is the program of God, the unfolding of the purpose of God to bless mankind, and he says, "I'm going to direct these blessings through Abraham and through his line." God gave these promises in order to bless the entire world.

Look at Psalm 117. We can turn to Psalm 117 because it's before we'll ever get there in our systematic exposition of the Psalms which is on hold for just a few more weeks, but Psalm 117 says, "Praise the LORD, all nations; Laud Him, all peoples! For His lovingkindness is great toward us, And the truth of the LORD is everlasting. Praise the LORD!" And so embedded in the hymnbook of Israel is a call to all nations to praise God and to worship him and to ascribe glory and honor to him. So this is just an outworking a thousand years after Abraham if not more, a thousand years later the Psalmist's call is going out to all of the nations to praise God, to laud him, to honor him.

So this is woven through the Scripture. Think about Jonah, the prophet Jonah going to the city of Nineveh to preach, to proclaim judgment in order to bring them to repentance. In fact, turn there. It's toward the end of your Old Testament; it's the fifth of the minor prophets just before Micah, and you know the whole story. We won't rehearse it all but here's Jonah in the line of Abraham sent out, he rebels against it, you know the story, but look at the unfolding, look at the unveiling of the intention of God and the goodness and the purpose of God to those outside the Jewish race. Jonah 4:9, "God said to Jonah, 'Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?' And he said, 'I have good reason to be angry, even to death.' Then the LORD said, 'You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight.'" Verse 11, "Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?" So God sends a Jew to preach to this pagan, foreign nation, and he brings them all to repentance, and one day we'll study Jonah too and we'll see that God brought not just a temporary reprieve from judgment, he actually saved that entire generation found in that city.

So this nation that was headed toward judgment is brought to repentance through the preaching of even a rebellious Jew. God brings blessing to them and as we said on a Sunday, that the blessing ultimately came to us as well. The blessing came to us through the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ, the descendant of Abraham. You and I are on the receiving end of the blessing here where God says, "I am going to bring, I will bless all the families of the earth." You and I who are Christians, we are still, as it were, flowing in the wake of the goodness of this promise that God gave. We are part of the families of the earth, we are here in Christ and here we are on the receiving end of eternal blessings from God which he first started to unfold to Abraham in Genesis 12, and what we see is that it kind of gives us perspective on a couple of different things. Let's see if I can keep this straight in my mind. I want to wrap this up from a biblical sense and then help us think through it in a personal sense that gives us something to take away with us tonight.

When you think about these promises to Abraham, there's a personal dimension to these promises. God uniquely made Abraham's name great. There is a national dimension to

these promises. The nation that came through Abraham's loins was great. There is a universal dimension to these promises. All the families of the earth are blessed through these promises and so if you think about it in terms of an ever-expanding series of concentric circles, there is this immediate blessing that is given to Abraham, then the blessing that's given to his descendants as they become a great nation, and then it expands even further to encompass all the families of the earth. There is blessing upon blessing upon blessing woven through these very short three verses in Genesis 12. Scripture bears testimony to it and the unfolding of world history since the close of the Canon bears witness to it as well, and you and I stand in the overflow of those blessings.

Now, what does that mean for us today? What can we take away from this? How could we think about this in a way that kind of gives us something personal to walk away from in the midst of some sorrow and uncertainty of different stories from different people that are gathered together in the room, not simply something personal to me today? This is for all of us. What can we think about this? How can we give some perspective to this? Well, let me suggest a couple of different things. One is this, is that this puts our lives and our issues into perspective. We're talking about promises that God made 4,000 years ago that he is still keeping. This reminds us that God has an eternal plan that he is most certainly unfolding and while generations come and go, while our lives rise and fall, while there are joys and sorrows and billows of goodness and sadness that come to was, those of us who are Christians, those of us who believe the Bible, those of us who are recipients of our own of the promises of God, we need to have the capacity to expand our thinking beyond what affects us at the moment and to always come back and to put it into the greater context of the fact that there is a greater purpose going on in the universe than simply what happens to me in my life, and this has a way of humbling us. It humbles us to realize that we are not the center of the universe. It humbles us to realize that there is something far greater and far more vast that we can't see but that the outworking of the universe, the outworking of the earth, the outworking of history so far transcends us that we put our problems into that kind of perspective and we realize that before we were born, God was working out his promises; after we're gone, God is going to continue to be working out his promises; that God is sovereign and he is mightily marching through history to accomplish what he wants. So when things come into our lives that are perhaps different than what we would have chosen them to do, the first thing that we do in light of this, in light of seeing these great promises of God unfolded, is that we humble ourselves before it. We humble ourselves. I've felt this very strongly today, you know, when things come that it reminds us that we are not in control, that sooner or later there are going to be events and people that come that assert authority, that have impact upon us that is beyond our control, and we accept that, is the point. We humble ourselves under that and we say, "Okay, this just reminds me that I'm not the one in charge."

Secondly, this teaches us to trust. This teaches us to trust. The God who made promises to Abraham has kept those promises in ways that no one could have ever guessed. Look, think about it like this, imagine yourself standing next to Abraham, this barren, 85-year-old man, who has nothing going for him except a history of paganism and this promise is made to God and there is nothing else but the word of God to verify the outcome of it. You would never guess with your unsanctified mind, you would never guess without the

benefit of further revelation from God, how far-reaching this was going to be and yet here it is, God is speaking to one man in Genesis 12, the whole blessing to the earth just explodes and is continuing to unfold. The echoes of that promise are continuing to echo and they're going to echo throughout all of eternity. You know, excuse the term, especially those of you that are associated with Answers in Genesis, this was one real big bang. God made a promise and, bang, everything is expanded out from there. You would never guess that and yet by the sheer power of his word, by the sheer power of the sovereignty of God, God has delivered. God has kept his promises to Abraham and he's not done yet in ways that go beyond anything that Abraham could have asked or thought. And to us he comes and says, "I will never leave you nor will I ever, ever forsake you. That God works together for good all things to those who love him and are called according to his purpose. I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

And the God who makes those promises intending for us to appropriate them and shape our lives and our perspective on life by them, intends for us to see that just as he is magnificently powerful to keep his promises to Abraham, we should expect nothing less from him in keeping his promises to us as well. And whether it's sorrow or joy, whether it's loneliness or abundance, whether it's poverty or riches, whatever the case may be, we should always come back, we should come back and look at how God has kept his promises to Abraham and say, "Oh, this is how God does it." We should find in our heart a sense of conviction and certainty that says, "This is how God does it. He keeps his promises in ways that go far beyond anything that I could ask or think. And even though I might be in a position like Abraham where I don't get it and it all seems kind of narrow and closed in and there just doesn't, I don't know where tomorrow, what tomorrow looks like," you remember the promises to Abraham and you say, "God is a God who magnificently keeps his promises and I believe him. I belong to him. And when he says he works all things together for good, I'm going to take even this sorrow, even this broken heart," I am not talking about myself now, I'm talking about what's on your heart tonight, the things that burden you tonight. This is for you. This is not for me anymore. What you need to be saying to yourself is, "I belong to this God who is so mighty and faithful and good to keep his promises that I'm going to trust him because look at what he promised to Abraham and look how magnificently he kept it and do you know what? He hasn't changed. He can't change. He is the immutable, unchanging, sovereign God and God has come in his word and he has made promises that affect and impact my life and here in my weakness, here in my sorrow, here humbled by the circumstances of life, I'm going to trust him because he deserves that trust. The circumstances of my life are not an indication that those promises have been revoked, that God has been unfaithful to me when he was faithful to Abraham. Out on the suggestion. Out on the suggestion." We refuse to tolerate that unbelief lurking in our hearts. We exterminate it. We mortify it. We kill it and we say, "No, I will not let my heart be a place where unworthy thoughts of God take root. I'll fight against them."

So we humble ourselves, we trust him, and the final thing that that leads us to then is a sense of hope. A confident expectation that I will see and experience the blessing of God because we see the pattern. We see the pattern. God makes promises to someone and then he keeps them and we see ourselves, we see that in Abraham beyond all that I could ask

or think. We see promises that are meant for us as well and we say, "He's going to keep that promise to me too." I may not give birth to a great nation like Abraham did, that was unique to him, but somehow, some way, you say to yourself...this is what you have to do, beloved. If you want to walk with Christ, you have to cultivate the ability to do this. You have to cultivate the spiritual stamina and strength and courage and commitment to bring this out of your heart because this is in your heart. God has placed this within you by your spirit. You are meant to stir this up in your mind and you say, "I am confident in God. I am confident of his promises and the difficulties and the sorrows that I face right now are not a contradiction of that and I am not going to tolerate the thought that suggests maybe God is not going to be fair or good to me." The greater the problem, the greater the sorrow, the greater the opposition, the more you rise up and say, "The deeper this problem is only indicates the more magnificent way God is going to manifest his faithfulness to me in the end." And that is confident expectation. That is what hope means, that we are confident that in the end God is going to show his goodness to us in ways that go beyond all that we ask or think. And because that is your ultimate expectation, because that is certain based on the promise of God, you reach into the future, as it were, and you grab hold of that ultimate final blessing and you bring it into the present and let it shape your perspective on life now. You don't dwell in the sorrow. You don't give in. You don't collapse under the weight of it. The promises of God are enough. We are humbled as he works out his eternal purpose. We trust him and that trust leads to a certain hope.

Let's pray together.

Father, what a wonderful God you are and while this perhaps has meandered a little bit from Genesis 12, Father, it's just our desire to know you in the fullness of your word, to see that the promises that you set in motion with Abraham are an indication of how you operate in the world, and it kind of unlocks biblical and world history for us to see that. Well, we thank you, Father, that as we think about what this says about you, that it has great meaning for us here today. You're a great, sovereign, mighty God. You are a promise making God. And praise be to your holy name the greatness of that is that you are a promise keeping God. You keep your promises without fail. And Father, just as Christ promised, "I will be with you always even to the end of the age. I will never, ever leave you nor will I ever, ever forsake you," Hebrews 13, "that you work all things together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose," Romans 8, Father, what we've seen here this evening is that you have defined the course of how you will deal with us who are in Christ. We will see your blessing in the land of the living. We will rejoice and we will find that our trust and our confidence in you was not in vain. Father, we thank you in advance knowing that the way that you culminate your blessing with us gathered around the throne in heaven will be far greater than anything we hope for, will be far greater than anything that we even had the capacity to desire, Father, because the blessing will be according to your great, sovereign, infinite mind, your great, sovereign, infinite goodness toward your people and your great, sovereign grace. God, we bow before you. We love you. We honor you. We worship you and we thank you for what we have now and we thank you for what is yet to be. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

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