

The Promise of Blessing

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 December 2024

Preacher: Jesse Kincer

[0 : 00] Okay, go ahead, if you've got a Bible, turn to Genesis 12. We're continuing in our Advent series, and the Advent series that we're looking at is specifically in the promises of God, and how those promises play out through the Bible from beginning to end, and how the coming of Jesus was the ultimate gift of God's promise.

And that promise began way back in the beginning. God made a promise to Adam and Eve, but the promise, think about this, the first promise in the Bible isn't what we would expect. The first promise was, you can eat of any trees in the garden, any fruit in the garden you're good with, except for one. And if you eat that forbidden fruit, you will die. That was the first promise God made in the Bible. Well, guess what they did? They ate the forbidden fruit, and so God comes, and that place where I'm sure they were filled with dread, awaiting the fulfillment of God's promised judgment. God stops everything and speaks a new and better promise. He says, one day, somewhere off in the future, a seed, an offspring, born of the woman, would become mankind's champion. He would be the serpent crusher. This seed promise was brought up again by God at different places in history, with Abraham, then again with David, and with some of the prophets when God's people were in exile.

[1 : 24] And each of those promises, those subsequent promises, carried a particular significance of their own. And what they do is they help to understand the fullness of what God's seed promise would do to fix the fall.

And today, we're going to look at the seed promise God made to Abraham, and how it is partially realized, how it was partially realized in the nation of Israel, but ultimately how it was fulfilled perfectly in Jesus.

So Genesis 12, chapter 1, or sorry, Genesis 12, verses 1 to 3. Now the Lord said to Abraham, 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, and 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. This is God's word. Now we briefly touched on this last week.

We're going to dive into this a lot more today. And so this passage that we read, it takes place centuries and centuries after Adam and Eve. And God picks one man out of all the people on the earth and makes this big promise.

[2 : 38] He says to them, in you, right? Like the King James version of that is, Abraham, in your loins, all the families of the earth shall be blessed. And here God confirms and adds to his promise that he made to Adam and Eve, and to Eve specifically, that through her, however many great grandson Abraham is, through him, with Eve, this promised seed was going to crush the serpent's head, that serpent Satan, the one whose desire and power is bent against God, and bent on turning man against God, and to corrupt and destroy God's creations, especially us.

And that great promise that was made to Eve, he now says to Abraham something else. That seed promise, it hasn't changed, but right now it's being amplified. Not only is a new blessing introduced, but the pattern of blessing is introduced.

And by Abraham, we find the pattern of God's promise. In verses two to three, we have these great promises of blessing and protection over Abraham and over his offspring or his seed, and also that through them, all the families of the earth would be blessed, right?

And we often love that. We focus on verses two to three, but we can easily forget that there was a verse one. Before the promises would come, what does God say to Abraham?

Abraham, you must leave your country, you must leave your kindred, you must leave your father's house. Abraham, you must go to a far off country full of nations that won't receive you, nations that you must dwell amongst, but yet be separate from, never be a part of.

[4 : 22] And Abraham, you must receive the promise inheritance in a strange way. Not yourself, you're not going to get it, but it will be through your children that you don't have yet.

And these, this, this offspring, this seed would then become a people unto themselves, a great nation. So we see the, the pattern set here from one seed of Eve would come many, many seeds, a nation through which God would bless the earth.

And Abraham, what he did, he believed God, right? He believed God and did just that, which tells us something else about what the promise rests upon. It rests upon faith, AKA trust and obedience. And you can't have one without the other. And so Abraham believed God, he trusted God, he obeyed him, he walked in faith all around Canaan land, never settling down, never building himself a house or a city.

As the saying goes, he had nowhere to rest his head. He was a sojourner. And time marches on, Abraham dies, he passes away, and the seed promise is carried on through Isaac and then through Jacob.

[5 : 34] And Jacob has 12 sons and those 12 sons have family. So Jacob and his family, they end up leaving Canaan and living in Egypt to survive a famine. And they settle in this land in the, in part of Egypt called Goshen, and it's far away from Canaan.

And in that far off place, over many generations, they multiply and they become a great nation. But also in that place, they become slaves, slaves to Pharaoh.

And at his appointed time, God remembers his covenant with Abraham, the inheritance promised to his seed and that in him, the families of the earth would be blessed.

So what happens? He calls the seeds of Abraham, the nation of Israel out of Egypt to go to the land of promise. Man, it seems like the seed promise is about to be fulfilled.

I mean, if you're living in that moment, if you know the text and you know the promises of God and you know those stories, that's probably what you're wondering. And God brings them out of Egypt and on the way to Canaan, God makes a pit stop at a place called Mount Sinai.

[6 : 43] And there at Mount Sinai, he makes a covenant with this mighty nation. And that's found in Exodus 19, which is a summation of all that God is intending to do with this covenant. And so we're going to read the first six verses of that chapter.

And it says this, on the third new moon, after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt. And on that day, they came into the wilderness of Sinai.

They set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai and they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain while Moses went up to God. The Lord called to him out of the mountain saying, thus shall you say to the house of Jacob and tell the people of Israel, you yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

Now, therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine.

And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to Israel.

[7 : 54] And what God does at Sinai and all that happens with the law and the giving of the law and the Ten Commandments and the establishment of the ceremonies of sacrifice and the tabernacle system and all of that, what he is doing there is akin to a wedding ceremony.

What he is doing in this moment is akin to that. It's like a bride and groom who make vows to love and cherish, honor, obey, and remain faithful. And God brings Israel to this marriage altar of Mount Sinai on wings of eagles, so to speak, right?

In grand style, out of Egypt, carefully and safely. And he brings them to himself to enter into this covenant relationship. And so again, we see a pattern here. If you will, we see the same pattern. If you will indeed obey my voice. If you will indeed keep my covenant. So it was with Abraham. So it was with Abraham's seed, the nation of Israel. God calls them out to leave the old behind in order to step into something new, something better.

The pattern again is if you believe me, trust me, have faith, heed my call and obey. Then the promises. And God's seed promise is secured in faith and obedience.

[9 : 10] And that faith and obedience can be costly, but it's worth it because of the promises attached to it. By Israel, we find the privilege and responsibility of God's promised blessing.

Now, think about this. If you're Israel hearing this message of God through Moses for the first time, and it begins, now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant.

Well, something's coming up after that, right? What are you hoping comes next? It kind of sounds like a blank check from God, right? Man, is it going to be wealth? Is it going to be cars? Is it going to be spouses?

Is it going to be kids? Is it going to be big houses? Is it going to be a boat? Is it going to be winning the lottery? A really good career? Vengeance on our enemies? Like, what is the blank check that God's writing here that we would like to feel in, right?

Now we're kind of getting excited. So how you would hope God would finish that sentence, that says a lot about our hearts, right? And here's what God promises.

[10 : 10] The very next thing he says, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples. And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

That's the beautiful part of the promise. And let's look at that first part, the privilege of being God's treasured possession. See, you and I are made to be cherished.

God created us that way. And you shouldn't be ashamed of that. You shouldn't be ashamed to desire to be loved. That does not make you a weak person. It makes you a normal person.

It makes you a human being. And I want to say this, the bravest thing, the riskiest move you and I can make in life is opening our hearts to be loved.

Dan Allender says this, love demands us to step in. You cannot have love without stepping into vulnerability. And that is a scary place. To be vulnerable like that, to be loved like that, to need love like that, is to give someone power over you in a way.

[11 : 19] Love, God-like love, means losing control. It means giving power away freely. And that is probably why we feel a little bit of the ick when we hear God calling us to be his treasured possession, right?

We're thinking like, ain't nobody's possession, you know? Sorry. We don't like that thought, do we? But Ken, here's the question. I want to probe us with a little bit more.

Can you truly experience love without giving yourself over to someone else? And that is the vulnerability that love calls us to.

But consider this really important point too. Notice in this covenant at Sinai that God has made, that he is making the first step in love here.

By saying, I want you, Israel, I want you more than anything. Like you're more precious stuff. Like everything in the earth is mine. I already got it. But you, you're going to be the most precious thing to me.

[12 : 19] He is showing his heart's desire. He is putting himself on the table there of how much he cherishes them and desires them. Without any hesitation. He is giving them the potential power to reject him and to grieve him.

And to be honest, we see that later on. But that doesn't make him any lesser in power. It doesn't rob him of his godness. He doesn't hold back putting himself out there to love us.

He doesn't make, it doesn't make him weak and needy. And actually, I would say it makes him even greater. And that's the paradox of love. In one sense, it makes you vulnerable, which seems humble and weak.

But in that, at the same time, choosing to do that of your own volition, despite the risks, is I would say, arguably the mark of true strength and greatness. And as much as God wanted Israel to be his treasured possession, he wanted Israel to take him as their treasured possession.

When you read through the covenant books, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, as God speaks to Israel, he repeats this phrase about himself, the Lord, your God.

[13 : 33] That's what he calls himself, the Lord, your God. He is reiterating, I want to be your God, your possession, your treasured possession, just as much as I want you to be my people and my possession.

And that is the beauty and the privilege of covenant love, the covenant love that God calls us into, that we are to cherish him and we are to be cherished by him.

This is the privilege of the promise that was given to Israel. But with that promise came another part of the promise, the responsibility of priesthood and holiness.

And there is a lot to be said about this, but for the sake of time, we're going to be concise here. Priesthood and holiness both carry the same quality of being set apart to God, which is in line with the treasured possession motif.

No doubt the other quality of priesthood and holiness is that you are not just set apart, you are set apart to God for the purpose of displaying his glory. That's what God has in mind here.

[14 : 33] And so with this blessing, with the privilege of being God's treasured possession, because this comes with this other bit of responsibility as well. But of all the things God could want his people to be, why priests?

Why? Why priests? Well, to be a priest meant to be someone set apart to minister before God on behalf of God's people. For priests to qualify to stand before God, they first had to be made holy. They had to be qualified and made holy to do that. And that happened through a consecration ceremony that's outlined 10 chapters later in Exodus 29. And I'll spare you the finer details and share the highlights.

So first, if you were to be qualified as a priest, you had to begin with this. First, you had to be from a certain tribe and a family of that tribe. And then you had to go through a ritual cleansing of the body with water.

And then you had to put on priestly robes and a turban. And then you were anointed with fragrant oil. And then you had to make three sacrifices, a sin offering, a burnt offering, and a peace offering.

[15 : 43] And then the blood from the sacrifice was placed on the priest's right earlobe, the right finger, and the right toe, signifying that they were covered fully in the blood of the sacrifice.

And also that blood of the sacrifice was mixed with the fragrant oil and then sprinkled on the priestly robes, therefore declaring it fully clean and fully holy.

And after all of this happened, then the priest was deemed holy and sufficient for service to God in the presence of God for the sake of God's people. Now, you could argue from this that the consecrated priest was the holiest person among all of Israel at that time.

Now, here is what is interesting. When we go back to Exodus 19, God says, I want all my people to be that. And I may not convince you of this, but that's God's highest idea of blessing for you and for me, to make us holy and to make us priests.

In that old way of priesthood, the privilege was that those who were priests got to draw nearest to God. But also they had the privilege of being able and the responsibility to serve others, serve his people in a way that let them draw nearer to God as well.

[17 : 06] And that's what God had in mind for Israel, a holy nation of priests that drew near to him and served others so they could draw near to him too. That was his plan, or so it seemed.

Because what's interesting is the relationship of Exodus 29 and Exodus 19 and what they have about the priesthood. In Exodus 29, God is very specific about the priesthood and specific about it being limited to one family within a specific tribe of Israel, which stands in contrast to God's stated desire in Exodus 19 that he wanted Israel to be a kingdom of priests, which begs the question, God, which one is it?

Both can't be true. Well, turns out it can. Bear with me a little bit longer. Through one seed of Eve, Abraham, who was called to leave his country, kindred, and father's house, came forth a covenant people, many seeds, called to be a holy nation and a kingdom of priests.

But in that place, in that time, only some could be priests. And the nation ended up being not so holy when you read the rest of it. Israel failed, and they proved not to be the promised seeds after all.

We know this. We see that the temple was destroyed, which is kind of the temple. It's a pretty big knock to the priesthood when your temple, the place you're supposed to serve, gets destroyed. The people were exiled, and they were dispersed into foreign lands, which again is a pretty big knock if you're trying to be a holy nation in one place.

[18 : 41] And so it seemed God's seed promise to bless the earth through Israel went unfulfilled. But this is where the wonderful attributes of God's sneakiness and cheekiness come into play.

Where the nation of Israel failed, where Abraham's seeds fell well short, God would redeem the promise himself and fulfill it in a way that nobody could have imagined.

God called someone greater than Abraham, who was before Abraham and yet born a son of Abraham. He was called to leave his country, his father's house and kindred, and go to a land and a people that would not receive him.

He would end up living as one who had no place to rest his head. And so Jesus left heaven and was born in Bethlehem of Judea in Israelite, the seed of Abraham.

Through him, God would make a new holy nation with new bloodlines different to Abraham, not born of the flesh, but born of the spirit through faith in him. He would establish a new priesthood himself.

[19 : 48] The seed of Abraham fulfilled the blessing made to Abraham. In him, in Christ, our savior, the nations of the world have been blessed, and we who believe and become children of God, we are the seed of the seed of Abraham.

Those born of Christ by faith through the spirit, we who are his seed are born as priests because we are born of him who has become the great high priest. And so we are also naturally priests born of him.

We inherit that role just like the sons of Aaron inherited that role from him. And we are qualified to serve as priests because we have been washed in the waters of his baptism, robed in his righteousness, and covered by the blood of his once and for all sacrifice from head to toe.

This is why the apostle Paul wrote the following to all the saints scattered amongst the church. 1 Peter 2, 9-10, But you, saints of God, who have put your faith and your trust and your hope in Jesus Christ and all that he has done, you are a chosen race.

You are a royal priesthood. You are a holy nation, a people for his own possession. See the echoes back to Exodus. That you may proclaim the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

[21 : 07] Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you have, you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Do you believe that?

Do you believe and trust that Jesus Christ came and established a new people born of him? That those born of him, his many seeds, have inherited a priesthood from him?

Do you believe that you are God's treasured possession? Do you believe that we, the church, people of God, together, that we have the privilege of being a holy nation and a kingdom of priests through whom the promised seed is bringing blessing to all the families of the earth?

Do you believe that? As the band comes up and we seek to respond. In a moment, we're gonna take communion. But before that, I wanna say to you, if you're not yet a follower of Jesus, I wanna say to you and compel you, think about this.

Your first step isn't towards the communion tables today. Jesus is calling you to leave behind your life. Come out from it.

[22 : 22] Come out from those things that you call precious and that you call necessary and that you've been holding onto and have grown up and have become normalized. And he's calling you out of those things and come join him in a new place, in his kingdom.

Salvation comes by faith, which requires that first step of trust, that first step of obedience and responding to it. And believe and confess that Jesus died for your sins, that he rose again, and he's reigning in heaven and ministers before God as your great high priest.

And in a moment, you're gonna have an opportunity to respond if that's you. There's gonna be a prayer up on the screen for you to pray. You can pray that prayer and that is your response to God calling you today.

Now to us in the room who are already followers of Jesus, how is God calling us to respond?

Communion, we're gonna come to it in a moment. We're gonna come to the tables that are spread throughout the room to get back to our seats and take it when we're ready.

But first, I wanna give us a time to just sit with God. Communion reminds us of how much God cherishes us, what he did to close that gap that separated us.

[23 : 34] He did everything he took. He sent his own son to die so we could be his children. Jesus went to the cross and suffered for you and for me so we could be a new people, a kingdom of priests.

Not through our own works, not through our own great efforts, but through faith in him. Dwell on those truths today in prayer. Dwell on that privilege and that responsibility in prayer with him.

Let it stir you with faith and with gratitude. And ask, what does it mean for you to live in that beautiful calling, in that beautiful privilege as a treasured possession? And what does it mean for you to live that out as part of God's people, as kingdom of priests, as holy nation?

So I'm gonna open a time of prayer and when I close in prayer, please just continue spending time with God and then when you're ready, come to the communion tables, take it and bring it back to your seat.

So Lord, we thank you. We thank you of your amazing grace. Man, your promises, God, are amazing and far beyond what we could ask or imagine and thank you for that, Lord.

[24 : 40] May these promises and what you fulfilled in Jesus Christ, may it sink deeply into our hearts. May it affect us in the way that we live and move and have our being.

And I pray this in your name, amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.