

February 22, 2009 Temple Baptist Church, Jamestown, ND
TITLE: THE BLESSING AND YOU, Genesis 12:1-3

Valentine's Day we were in my home church in Iowa for my father's wedding. Both he and his new wife, my new stepmom Mary, involved a lot of family in the ceremony. My three sisters stood up with my dad. Mary had her two daughters and daughter-in-law as her bridesmaids. The procession included all of the family: children, spouses, grandchildren, great grandchildren, brothers and so on. Dad and Mary's wedding became a **symbol of the joining of two families, two lives, two stories coming together to form a new story** with all of us now a part of something new and different. Although many of the traditional parts of a wedding ceremony were similar, the story was told in a different way.

Four weeks ago tomorrow morning (January 19) I woke around 2 a.m. with a very clear thought. Larry Kitchel, director of Christian Mission Aid in east Africa emailed our church some weeks earlier asking us to consider helping with an evangelistic outreach to a remote area of Uganda. I have been questioning if I am to be a part and if so, how to share the gospel message. When I woke the thought came to me very clearly, *Share about the blessing*. I continued to ponder this for an hour or so before returning to sleep. Today I would like to share the gospel message in a way you've probably never heard. I've used various methods, including The Roman Road, Steps to Peace with God, The Four Spiritual Laws, Sharing Jesus without Fear and a number of other approaches, but this will be in story form. I ask that you carefully consider what I am saying and then share with me whatever you sense God asking you to share.

The Bible begins with these words: *In the beginning God . . .* We learn of His creating the heavens, the earth, light, darkness, water, plants, trees and all life, including fish, birds, animals and reptiles, with humans made in His image, male and female. The Bible says in Genesis 1:28 that **God blessed them**. We learn of the special garden God made for the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, their role in it, the invitation to enjoy anything in the garden except the fruit of the one tree. Eve and Adam are tempted to eat of the forbidden tree by the serpent and are driven from the garden of Eden because of they trust the serpent's words and not God's. The **relationship of trust** they enjoyed was **broken by sin**. With His pronounced judgment God includes a **promise** that the seed of the woman will be in conflict with the seed of the serpent. All creation is affected by this sin so that there are now thorns and thistles where there was once fertile ground. Strife between people, hardship, pain and death will be the outcome.

Adam and Eve have two sons, one who kills the other when he is jealous of his brother's offering to God. Other sons and daughters are born and from these peoples the world is populated. **Although men and women still bear the likeness of God, few follow Him**. God eventually decides to make a **covenant with Noah**, a man who walks with God and finds grace in His eyes. God will

destroy all life through a great flood, sparing only Noah, his wife, his three sons and their wives on a very large boat, an ark, which takes Noah and his sons 100 years to build. God also brings at least two of every animal, bird and reptile, male and female, onto the ark to be spared. The Bible says that God shut the door of the ark with his hand. Noah, his family and all living things on board the ark wait for seven days. Then it begins to rain. For forty days and nights it rains. The flood waters rise, covering the entire earth and drowning all life. They spend over a year in the ark until the ark rests on a mountain, the flood waters recede, plants and trees begin to grow and all leave the ark.

Noah and his sons take some of the extras of the animals to sacrifice an offering of thanks to God. **God blesses Noah and establishes a covenant with him.** But the peoples who descend from Noah's sons Shem, Ham and Japheth begin to live by their own standards and care nothing for God. Wickedness and sin become widespread. Some even try to build a tower to heaven, but God disperses them throughout the whole world by making them speak different languages. Despite God's repeated intervention, men and women insist on going their own way.

Then God speaks to Abram, a 75-year old man, who lives in a far off country. (Read Genesis 12:1-3. cf. 18:18; 22:17-18; 26:2-5; 28:13-15) What is this blessing? **How will God bring about this blessing to Abram and bless others through him?** Abram has a wife, but no children. He travels to the land of Canaan and lives there as a foreigner. God makes a **covenant with Abram**, telling him to try to count the stars, for his descendants, his seed, will be like them in number. God promises Abram the land where he is now dwelling to his descendants. Abram is getting older. He doesn't always listen to God and he has a son by another woman, but **this son is not the child of the promise, the child of the blessing.** When Abram is 99, the LORD God appears to him again and changes his name to Abraham, *father of many*, telling him he will have a son by his wife Sarai, who will now be called Sarah, *princess*. A year later when Sarah is 90 and Abraham 100, Sarah has a son and names him Isaac, *laughter*.

Abraham eventually dies, and the LORD God reminds Isaac of **His promise of the blessing.** Isaac has two sons, Esau and Jacob. Esau does not follow the LORD God and, for a long time, Jacob does not follow Him either. But God speaks to Jacob and tells him that the promise of the blessing given to his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac will also be given to him. Jacob has twelve sons and his name is changed to Israel. From Jacob's family comes a great people, the Israelites. When a famine strikes the land of Canaan, they go to Egypt for 400 years, where they are eventually made slaves. God delivers His people from Egypt by the hand of His servant Moses.

All these people struggle with sin, sin of desire, sin of pride, sin of disobedience. Some eventually follow God and are obedient to Him, but few actually live in the blessing. God calls Israel His people, a people who are to

live by His standards and His ways. They are not to worship other gods, make idols or misuse the LORD God's name. They must dedicate one day a week for rest, honor father and mother, not kill others, not commit adultery, not steal, not speak falsely or lie and not covet what belongs to another. God makes the people of Israel into a great nation. Sometimes they follow Him, but more often they go their own way. They ask for a king to rule them and though God is grieved, He gives them their wish. **Some of the kings lead the people to be faithful to God, but most do not.**

Meanwhile the **promise of the blessing remains**. Here is the problem. The people of Israel begin to think that God chose them from the other peoples because they are special. They begin to think that God loves them more than other peoples, but they are wrong. God chooses them and gives them His promise so that they might live for Him. Others will also want to know and live for the Creator God Who loves them.

God doesn't choose them because they are special. God chooses them and **they become special, but only for the purpose of sharing His promised blessing with others**. So what is that blessing? In a word: relationship.

The people of Israel misunderstand. They think the blessing is for them. Yes, the land, their families, health and provisions are all examples of God's blessing, but these are only a small part of the bigger blessing. **The blessing is ultimately about a relationship with God**. God blesses the people of Israel, not so that they can sit and hoard that blessing, but so they might pass it on to others. They are blessed, so they might share the blessing with others.

By keeping God's laws the people of Israel would become an example for others. God warns His people that the blessing can become a curse if they do not follow His ways. Throughout the Old Testament we hear of hints that God's blessing is also meant for others. When dedicating the great temple, Solomon prays that God would hear the prayers of foreigners *"so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you."* (1 Kings 8:43) In Psalm 72 Solomon composes a song for people to pray for the welfare of the king. *All nations will be blessed through him, and they will call him blessed.* Psalm 72:17 The problem is that it isn't the king that should be their focus, but THE KING, God Himself. **Solomon has the right words, but the wrong focus**. Likewise, in other psalms when the nations are called to praise God, **Israel forgets that they have the responsibility to tell others about Him** (cf. Psalm 67; 87; 96; 98:2; 117:1)

The people of Israel become prideful and God gives them many opportunities to repent of their sin and turn to Him. They continue to think they are special to God and that He will not discipline them. Again, they forget that they are only special because He chose them to bless others through them. They try to hoard the blessing.

God sends prophets to remind them of His ways and that He loves other peoples, too. He sends His prophet Jonah to the hated Ninevites. Much to Jonah's dismay they repent and turn to God. God says through Amos that Israel is no more special to Him than the people from Cush, who come from the upper Nile region to the south of Egypt (Amos 9:7). He speaks of "*all the nations that bear my name.*" (Amos 9:12)

The prophet Isaiah says that God has a plan for the nations. God will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, the nations. "*The people walking in darkness have seen a great light . . . For to us a child is born, to us a son is given.*" (Isaiah 9:2, 6) The day will come when Egypt and Assyria, Israel's ancient enemies, will also worship the LORD God. Israel, Egypt and Assyria will be *a blessing on the earth* (Isaiah 19). One will come Who will bring good news (Isaiah 40:9; 41:27; 52:7; 61:1), the Servant Who will be a covenant (cf. 42:1, 6) and bring God's salvation (cf. 45:22-25). God invites foreigners to serve, love and worship Him, "*for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.*" (Isaiah 56:6-8). The prophets Zechariah and Malachi also speak of the nations and their being part of the blessing (Zechariah 2:11; 8:13; 4:16; Malachi 1:5, 11, 14).

Four hundred years after the prophecy of Malachi, another prophet appears to the Jewish people, a man named John, who tells them his calling is to prepare them for the One to come. Actually this One is already present, but has not yet begun His ministry. He was born to a woman who had never been with a man. The angel Gabriel announces to this woman that her child is the Son of God, the One long awaited. Zechariah, John's father realizes this, as does Simeon when this child, Jesus, is dedicated after His birth at the temple in Jerusalem.

When Jesus, at 30 years of age, begins to announce His ministry and allude to His identity, He chooses to share these words with the people of His hometown, words written by the prophet Isaiah 700 years earlier. "*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*" Luke 4:18-19 He tells the crowd that today the scripture is fulfilled. First they say He speaks well. Then He reminds them God also desires His mercy be given to nonIsraelites, nonJews, as well. Many years before God sent Elijah to a widow in a foreign country to provide for her during a famine, but not to Israel. God healed a foreigner, Naaman, from leprosy by the hand of the prophet Elisha, but not any Israelites. He implies that God didn't do these things in Israel, because they had no faith and His listeners are not different from their ancestors. The people become so angry that they want to push Him off a cliff.

Many flock to Jesus to hear His teaching, be healed and learn about God, but Jesus angers the religious authorities. He kicks the merchants out of the temple, who are selling in the very area reserved for the Gentiles to pray to God, quoting from Isaiah, "*my house will be a house of prayer for all the nations.*"

Jesus tells them and shows them about living in relationship with God, declaring Himself to be the only way to God. Who is this man? He is the one whom the Old Testament prophets spoke about. He is the seed of the woman that God told the serpent would crush his head. When beaten and asked if is the Son of God, He said, *Yes*.

In the fullness of time God sent His son, born of a woman, the Bible says. (Galatians 4:4) The religious leaders hated Him, arrested Him and turned Him over to the Roman authorities, saying He was worthy of death. He was tortured and killed, dying on a Roman cross. They buried His body in a tomb on a Friday, but on Sunday He rose from the dead. God made Him alive Who was dead. Jesus taught and appeared to many over the next forty days before ascending to heaven in a cloud. Angels told Jesus' followers that He would one day return in the same way He left them.

A few days later one of His followers realizes that the good news Jesus shared, the good news Jesus is is exactly what was promised Abraham so many years before. *“Through your offspring (seed) all peoples on earth will be blessed.”* Acts 3:25 Years later another of Jesus' followers shares that the blessing is not just for descendants of Israel, but for all who come to Jesus by faith. It's for the nations, the Gentiles, too. *The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel (good news) in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.* Galatians 3:8-9

All who receive Jesus by faith can be part of the blessing given first to Abraham thousands of years ago. We, too, can enjoy relationship with God Himself, the relationship that was broken when Adam and Eve sinned. Jesus, Who never sinned, died for my sin and your sin (the wrong things we think, do and say) on that cross, so you and I can be forgiven and made part of God's family. We become part of the story, the story that started with Adam and Eve, through Noah, through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Israel), through Moses, and ultimately to Jesus. **The blessing is about a relationship with God.**

The blessing is something we receive by faith. The blessing is Jesus. The blessing is what we must not only receive, but which we must also share with those who do not know Jesus. **The blessing is meant for all peoples, all nations, all languages, girls and boys, women and men, rich and poor, healthy and sick.** God cannot force us to receive His blessing, but He provides the way. He helps us to believe by His Holy Spirit, but He will not force us to believe. **He wants to bless you, so that you will be a blessing.**

Conclusion. One day soon Jesus is coming back to right all wrongs, to settle all injustices, to heal all hurts, to make all things new. Many opposed Jesus when He was on earth and many will oppose Him when He returns. Many do not want

to be confronted with their sin. Many do not want to live God's way. Many are confused by the serpent, who still has influence. But right now God wants you to become a new creation. He wants to bless you so that you will be and live in that blessing, sharing it with others. Do you want to be part of that blessing? Do you want to belong to Jesus? Do you want to be part of the same story . . . and pass on the blessing to others so that they, too, can be part of God's story? Will you receive the blessing? (Pray. John 3:16) Instead of being prideful and selfish, share His blessing generously with others, even as God is generous with you.