

JESUS IS THE SON OF ABRAHAM

Genesis 12:1-7; 17:1-8, 21; 22:15-18

INTRODUCTION

In our current economic situation people are looking for guarantees. Whether it's the big three auto makers looking for loan guarantees so they can continue to stay in business or a laid off worker looking for some promise of employment or economic assistance or a currently employed person wanting an assurance that they will have a job next year or the retiree wanting a pledge that their pension and retirement account are not going to evaporate--we are living in an environment where people are desperate for security. Most people are looking to the Federal government to supply those guarantees. What is most unnerving for most of us is that in spite of pledging billions of dollars to support the financial system and long hours negotiating a bailout for the auto industry the Federal government does not appear powerful enough to guarantee our financial future. So we citizens of the U.S. are experiencing a level of fear that has not been experienced in our country for decades. The fear and sense of insecurity is especially acute for we who live here, in Janesville, WI as the GM plant will close in less than two weeks. What has been a source of high paying jobs and financial security in our community will close its doors on December 23rd. Merry Christmas!

It feels almost inappropriate to be entering into this Christmas season with such large and foreboding clouds of doom upon the horizon. The giddiness and the glitz and the sappy sentimentalism of Christmas in America feel incredibly trite in light of these sobering realities. However, might I suggest to you that the real message of Christmas, rather than being made irrelevant by the threats we face is really the only antidote to the fear that we feel? The birth of Jesus to the Virgin Mary in that far away time and place is the guarantee for which we yearn. While this birth will not guarantee that you will have a job next year or that your pension and retirement will not evaporate, the coming of Jesus does secure the future for everyone who trusts in him. Whether you go through this next year full of fear and despair or full of peace and joy will be determined in large measure by how you respond to the coming of Jesus Christ into this world some 2000 years ago.

What I aim to do in these last three Sundays of December and on Christmas Eve is to demonstrate the sufficiency of Jesus by considering three of his ancestors and the OT character whose name he shares. What does it mean that the NT tells us that Jesus is the son of Abraham, the son of David, the son of Tamar and that he shares the same Hebrew name as Joshua, Moses' apprentice and the captain of Israel's armies as they conquer the land of Canaan? This morning we begin by considering what it means that Jesus is the son of Abraham. The first verse of the NT, Matthew 1:1 reads, "A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."

Abraham appears on the pages of the Bible at the end of Genesis 11. We are given just the most basic facts about his family. His name at the beginning of the story is Abram, not Abraham. He is the son of Terah, the oldest of three brothers. The family lives in Ur of the Chaldeans, which is modern Iraq. The second brother dies leaving behind a son named Lot. Abram is married to a woman named Sarai and we are told, she is barren, that is, unable to have children. Genesis 11 ends with Terah, Abram, Sarai and Lot leaving behind Ur, the country of their birth and traveling to the land of Canaan. However, they stop short of Canaan in Haran where Abram's dad, Terah dies.

It is at this point that God steps into the story and speaks to Abram. We know from other places in the Bible that Abram was an idol worshipper from an idol worshipping family and an idol worshipping culture. In other words, Abram was a sinner. There was nothing remarkable about him and nothing in Abram that attracted God to him. Rather, God freely, according to the pleasure of his own will, chose Abram and made extravagant promises to him. In Genesis 12, he told this non-descript, wandering, sinful nomad with a barren wife that he, the Creator God was going to make Abraham into a great nation, that he was going to bless him and make his

name great and cause Abram to be a blessing. He promised him that he was going to bless the people who blessed Abram and that he was going to curse those who cursed Abram. Finally, he promised Abram that it would be through him that all the families of the earth would be blessed by God. God then commands him to leave and go to the land he would show him, which ends up being the land of Canaan. Upon arriving in the land of Canaan he adds to the original promises by saying this in Genesis 12:7: "To your seed I will give this land." I know that most of the English translations say, "To your offspring/descendants I will give this land." However, the literal word is the singular, collective noun "seed." This will be important in a moment.

You may be asking, how do these promises that God made to this wandering nomad some 4000 years ago relate to me? How can this help me to face these uncertain times with any kind of security? I'm glad you asked. The answer to your question is that Jesus is the son, the seed of Abraham. Abraham appears on the pages of the NT 73 times. His life is used in a wide range of ways to help us to understand God's work in the world. The one place I want us to pay attention to is Galatians 3:15-18. (Read it.) The point that Paul makes here is that all the promises God made to Abram, who became Abraham in Genesis 17, were made not only to Abraham, but also to his seed. Notice, Paul says that while seed is a collective noun, that is, it can refer to either one seed or to many seeds, yet the singular shows that God's promises were not being made to every physical descendant of Abraham but rather to one, unique descendant, which is Christ. He is the seed to whom all the promises God made to Abraham apply.

Therefore, all the promises God made to Abraham belong to Jesus and to all who are united to Jesus by faith. What Paul does in Gal. 3:17-18 is to show that the giving of the law at Mt. Sinai did not nullify the promises God made to Abraham and to his seed. The point here, indeed of the whole letter to the Galatians, is that the promises God made are not based on our obedience to the law. Rather, the promises were made by grace to Abraham and are secured by the obedient life, sacrificial death and present intercession of Jesus Christ. These promises are not only extravagant, amazing promises but they are secured by Christ and not by our performance. If the promises depend upon our obedience to God's law, then we are not now and never can be secure. We must always live in fear. However, because they are made to Jesus and secured by Jesus, then they are guaranteed to all who believe in Jesus.

MAIN POINT

All the promises God made to Abraham are secured by Jesus, therefore...

I. All who trust Jesus are part of God's great nation of nations (12:2-3, 17:5, 22:17-18)

The first promise that God makes to this childless man, married to an infertile wife is that he will make him into a great nation. Not only will God make him into a great nation but he will make his name into a great name. In other words, the fame and reputation of Abraham will be legendary. Abraham and the nation to spring from him will stand at the head of all nations. Then notice, at the end of the promise, that God promises to bless all the peoples of the earth through this great nation that God creates through Abraham. Please note: it doesn't say God will bless every individual person but every "people-group." The word translated "peoples" refers to a grouping of people more than an extended family but less than a nation. It would appear in this promise that the peoples blessed through Abraham and his seed remain separate people. However, when we turn over to chapter 17 we discover that the promise is more inclusive.

In 17:4-6 God changes Abram's name to Abraham because he is going to make Abraham "the father of a multitude of nations." In the NT the apostle Paul takes this promise, that God makes Abraham the "father of a multitude of nations" to say that God has always intended to make a nation out of nations. That is, that God's purpose has always been to make a great nation of Abraham by including a multitude of nations in that one nation. The connection Paul makes is that Abraham, the man of faith, did not merely give rise to the nation Israel but that God, through Abraham's "seed" has made a multitude of nations into one nation by means of faith in the promise that is in Christ. In other words it is not ethnicity or race or culture or any other human

characteristic that determines who belongs to God's great nation but rather faith in Christ. Paul makes this same point in Ephesians 2-3 when he describes the "mystery of the gospel" which God revealed to he and the other apostles. He writes: "This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus... Consequently you are no longer foreigners and aliens but fellow citizens with God's people, members of God's household..." In other words, when God made this promise to make a great nation made up of many nations he was talking about the church of Jesus. The "seed" of Abraham, the descendants of Abraham are Jesus and all those who are related to him by faith.

Finally, I want you to look with me at Genesis 22:17-18. Here is God's promise restated but in a still more extravagant way. First he gives further definition to the numerical greatness of that nation God will create out of the promised seed. The church will consist of an innumerable number of individuals from all the peoples of the world. Then he says two apparently contradictory things: First, "Your seed will possess the gates of his enemies." Second, "In your seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed." To possess the gates of your enemies is simply a way of saying that Abraham's seed will conquer his enemies and take control of their cities. So what does it mean to say that Abraham's seed, our Lord Jesus Christ will conquer his enemies and, at the same time, bless the nations? What we are seeing here is the sovereignty and power of our Lord Jesus to both judge and save. Jesus conquers some of the nations with his grace, overcoming all resistance to his love and mercy by the work of the Holy Spirit and thus making some of the nations a part of his great nation. But also, for those who refuse to bow the knee to him by faith he will subdue them, not by the exercise of sovereign grace but by the exercise of his sovereign, judicial power. Every knee will one day bow to him, some cheerfully and happily by grace but others only due to fear of the Judge of all the earth, Jesus.

When you are united to the "seed of Abraham" by faith you become a citizen of the greatest nation in the universe. It is a nation of unlimited resources. It is an eternal nation. It is the only nation that cannot be touched by recession, nor will it ever fall into oblivion. One day all the kingdoms of this earth, including these United States of America, will cease to exist and belong to our Lord. Prior to that day our own nation may fall into oblivion, we may be destroyed by economic calamity or military aggression, but the kingdom of Jesus will endure forever. Therefore, you do not need to fear. The thing that will determine whether you live in fear or not in these fearful days is whether you view yourself as a citizen of God's nation or as a citizen of the U.S.A.

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- *And therefore...*

II. All who trust Jesus are the objects and conduits of God's blessing (12:2-3, 22:17)

It is an unfortunate fact that the term "blessing" or "blessed" has been emptied of its glory. We use it as a polite expression when someone sneezes or we use it in a pietistic, religious way that often appear like a trite cliché, not soul strengthening reality. If we had been reading the book of Genesis from the beginning the thrice repeated benediction of God upon Abram in Genesis 12 would blaze forth as the glorious and unexpected good news that it is. The opening two chapters of Genesis are full of the language of blessing. God showered his favor on the human race at creation. However, from chapter 3 through chapter 11 it is God's cursing of the world and of humans, except for Noah, that is the dominant theme. Beginning with God's exiling Adam and Eve from the Garden into the cursed world, his exiling of Cain to wander the world and continuing through God's destruction of the world by flood and his destroying human unity at the tower of Babel, chapters 3-11 are mainly an exhibition of God's disfavor, his curse upon human beings. So it is a remarkable thing that, out of the blue, God picks an idolatrous, weak man and tells him that it is his settled determination to bless him. He tells Abram that he is going to be an object of his favor from that day forward.

The word "bless" is synonymous with the word grace. Indeed the apostle Paul uses it in exactly this way in Romans 3 and 4 when he uses the language of "blessedness" in place of the word grace as he describes the fact that the wicked are declared not guilty but perfectly righteous by God only because they have trusted Christ, have placed their faith in him, not because they have obeyed the law. Thus, the word describes the fact that God freely, without reference to who I am or to anything I have ever done or decided determines to treat me as though I have always obeyed him and have never broken his law, though I am a notorious lawbreaker. You know that God has determined to bless you, to be kind to you, because you have placed your faith in the seed of Abraham, the Lord Jesus Christ, like Abraham placed his faith in the promise of God. If you are not trusting in Jesus you are not a blessed person but a cursed person, an object of God's wrath.

You and I live in a culture that has a hard time embracing the reality of what it means to be blessed by God, to be an object of grace. The reason for this is because of our emphasis on self-esteem. I recently listened to an interview with sociologist and author, Jake Halpern who told about a question that has been asked by a team of sociologists for the past 70 years of American teenagers. The question is simply to ask teens if they agree or disagree with this statement: "I am an important person." In the 1930's only 17% of American teenagers agreed with that statement. Today, over 80% agree. Most of us believe ourselves to be worthy objects of respect and affection by people and by God. This is one of the reasons there are so many sad and mad people. We are sad and mad because people don't love us the way we deserve, not because we think so poorly of ourselves, that is, we have a bad self image. The fact of the matter is that you and I are not worthy of love. We do not deserve to have God love us. We deserve God's wrath. Being blessed by God, being an object of his grace does not seem like a big thing to most of us because we believe we are important people who ought to be loved. God's love for Abraham as for every sinner is not due to the person but to God. God blesses people because that is the kind of God he is, not because we are so valuable, so worthy of his love. These two things always go together, a great sense of your own wickedness and great joy in the fact that God has blessed you with his salvation in spite of your wickedness. To be able to say that you are a person whom God has blessed, that is, you are a person that God has determined to love, is to say the most astonishing and unexpected thing in the universe.

In both Genesis 12 and 17 God says that Abraham and his seed are not only the object of his blessing but also will be a blessing to the nations. Obviously, first of all this is a direct reference to the coming of Christ to save people from every nation. God blesses people from all the peoples of the earth by giving Christ for their sins and the Holy Spirit to create faith in Christ. However, it is also clear that all who are blessed by God through Christ delight to bless others. The number of times this is stated in the Bible is overwhelming. All who are forgiven of their sins forgive others. All who are blessed by God bless others and do not hate and curse. All who have been shown mercy, show mercy to others. The key to being a gracious person is to grow in your experiential knowledge of God's amazing grace. The more you know how unworthy you are of his love and the more certain you know you are loved by God, the more loving you will become. The defects in our souls are only cured by the blessing of God, by the knowledge of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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III. All who trust Jesus will possess the earth (12:3, 7, 17:8, 22:17)

Genesis 12:7 contains the first promise of God regarding the land of Canaan. But notice that the promise is given to Abraham's "seed". Thus, the promise of inheriting the land of Canaan from the beginning is not given to national, ethnic Israel but only to the Seed of Abraham, the Lord Jesus Christ. From the beginning of the OT we are to understand that Jesus is Israel and that Israel is the foreshadowing, the representative type of Jesus. Then in Genesis 17:8 the promise is made more extravagant. God will give the whole land of Canaan, where Abraham is now an alien, a sojourner, as an eternal inheritance to Abraham and to his seed. The seed will

possess this land forever. Does the promise of the land of Canaan in the OT refer chiefly to that small piece of real estate situated on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea called Palestine or Israel today?

In Hebrews 11:13-16 we are told that Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Jacob all knew that the promise of the land of Canaan did not refer chiefly to the land of Canaan. Rather, they all knew that it was but a symbol of that greater land, the new heavens and the new earth. As Heb. 11:16 says, "They were longing for a better country, that is, a heavenly one." Thus the promise made to Abraham's seed, the Lord Jesus Christ is that he will one day own the entire universe. Listen to how God describes this in Isaiah 66:22, "As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the LORD, "so will your name and your seed endure." This is exactly what the apostle Peter describes in his second letter when he says in 2 Peter 3:10-13, "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare... That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness."

So not only will Jesus be the possessor of the universe but all those who trust in him will possess the world. This fact is to be a source of courage and joy to us no matter what may happen to us here. The famous 19th century British preacher, CH Spurgeon, used an excellent illustration to show how foolish it is for us to fear and despair over the loss of this world's possessions in light of the inheritance Christ has obtained for us. He asked his congregation to imagine a man who received word that his uncle had died and had bequeathed him a large fortune in his will. His uncle had lived in another city and so he had to travel there. On the way to receive his inheritance he is in an accident and his only carriage is destroyed and his horse is killed while he is yet a mile away from the city. How foolish we would think him if, as he walks that last mile he weeps and wrings his hands and is full of sorrow and despair over the loss of his carriage and horse. He is soon to be infinitely wealthy and though he must walk the last mile, what does it matter?

The amount of fear we are experiencing in the face of these threats to our economic well-being is in direct proportion to our confidence in obtaining heaven and to the value we set upon heaven. Are you sure you will inherit eternal life and do you think that living with the Lord Jesus in the new heavens and the new earth is a big deal or not? While the loss of this world's possessions may cause us some inconveniences and make our journey to heaven a little bit more unpleasant, yet these losses cannot affect our inheritance nor the joy we will experience when we obtain it. So we must fix our attention on Jesus' sufficient work and on the value of living with God forever in the new heavens and the new earth. All who live in the certainty of obtaining this eternal inheritance will be able to face the threat of the loss of this world's possessions with courage and joy.

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- *All who trust Jesus will rule over their enemies and possess the earth*

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