

Genesis 12:1-9

Dear Friends in Christ,

If we back up one chapter from our text (to Chapter 11) we will read the account of the Tower of Babel; these words: “Now the whole earth had one language and the same words...And they said to one another (the whole earth, global agreement!), ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves...’” (Gen. 11:1 & 4) What a picture! It’s the movement of human history down to the moment. It has been described as “Glory to man in the highest!”

Luther saw Babel as a judgment worse than the flood. The confusion of languages was the beginning of misunderstanding, horrible conflict, and unending disorder. It will be that way till the very end, as Scriptures say: “None is righteous, no, not one...All have turned aside...Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known.” **None is righteous!** (portions of Rom. 3:10-17) And Jesus said, “For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man.” (Matt.24:37)

But God had made a promise to our first parents. A Messiah. The 11th chapter of Genesis lists the post-flood generations of Noah’s son Shem. Commentator John C. Jeske writes, “The family of Messiah was not extinct. The Savior found a seed to serve him. His name? Abram, later changed to Abraham.” (John. C. Jeske, Genesis, People’s Bible Commentary, p. 113)

Again, our overriding theme for these Sundays of Lent is ***The Journey That Must Be Made***. This Sunday we consider that it had to be made . . .

TO KEEP THE PROMISES

I. Begins with Trust. (v. 1)

Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.” (Gen. 12:1)

This is the Lord Who speaks. The Savior God. He enters the life of Abraham, goes after him. Not the other way around. It’s what happened to you and me; Jesus words: “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.” (Jn. 6:44)

I’m sure you noted the extent of the departure: “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house...”. You will leave it all behind. And let’s remember: snail mail, cell phones, internet, or loading up the car to make a visit were non-existent! It’s not unlike any Christian’s journey through this world. God is moving things. He enters the life of a sinful human and sets the path.

So, everybody loves the 23rd Psalm. Hopefully, we don’t romanticize it, but understand the power of what it says. “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want...”. (Ps. 23:1a) God devoted more than twelve chapters of Genesis to the life of Abraham. If you haven’t read them, you should. God took a sinful human and Shepherded him through very, very good and very, very bad moments.

Recall these words of the 23rd Psalm: “He makes me...He leads me...He restores my soul...”. The “green pastures” and “still waters” and “paths of righteousness” are not part of a process of getting comfortable with this world. They’re part of God spiritually comforting us and preparing us for the goal: “And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

Abraham was told to pack up and move. The Good Shepherd was leading. There was a goal. It was part of keeping the promise of a distant child of Abraham - the Messiah - Who would one day earn eternal rest for the sin struggling, world-weary, soul. Yours. Mine.

It would be good to become very, very familiar with this word of Scripture: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths." (Prov. 3:6,7) Listen: To acknowledge the Lord is to **know**; specifically the knowledge we gain from Scripture.

II. Promises.

And then come the promises. God says to Abraham:

"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. 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." (vv. 2,3)

First, the promise to make of Abraham "a great nation" - Israel. The line of kings, starting with David, would culminate in the King of Kings, our Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit had Matthew write, "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." (Matt. 1:1)

Second, there is more to "a great nation" than the physical nation of Israel. The Scriptures say this:

For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham, because they are his offspring (by blood), but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." (that is, through a promise) This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring." (Rom. 9:6b-8)

Third, there was the promise, "I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing." And, indeed, Abraham would become a powerful example of faith and the promise that "whoever believes has eternal life." Paul writes in the Book of Romans, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." (Rom. 4:3) And from the Book of Galatians this Word of God: "Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for 'The righteous shall live by faith.'" (Gal. 3:11) Paul calls it, "the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe." (Rom. 3:22)

Fourth, God's word to Abraham, "him who dishonors you I will curse" will culminate in that moment when Jesus will say to those who reject the faith of such as Abraham, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." (Matt. 25:41)

And finally, the promise given to Abraham, "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" speaks to us, God's people through faith in Christ - to the true and everlasting Israel. It has been noted:

Abram would experience opposition as...he lived a nomad in lands belonging to others. But God promised him he would be so closely identified with the work of God that to curse him, to despise him, would be tantamount to opposing God. (Jeske, Genesis, p. 120)

III. As We Journey.

Abraham's journey was a journey that had to be made. He was part of the process of God setting everything in place for the time our Lord Jesus would offer Himself as the Lamb of God Who would take away the sin of the world. All of it! Would grant us citizenship in never ending life!

I'm thinking that everyone of this congregation enjoys singing, "I'm But A Stranger Here, Heaven Is My Home." We are strangers here. Heaven is our home. Let's look at it this way, we, too, are "nomads in lands belonging to others." When this life ends, we take nothing with us. However, while still living here, our battle with sin does not cease. The stresses of guilt and regret are not easily overcome. We cry out with Paul:

For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing...So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil likes to be close at hand...Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom. 7:18,19,21 & 24)

Centuries ago God was putting everything in place that would lead to that defining moment when our Lord Jesus would cry, "It is finished!" Abraham's life foreshadowed and was fulfilled in Christ. Every sin wiped away. All charges against us because of sin dropped.

What a blessing! What comforting joy! You know the words as well as I: "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation (the gift to gain His favor) for our sins." (I John 4:10)

God bless our journey. God bless our efforts to bring others with us.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

Second Sunday of Lent

February 25, 2018

Genesis 12:1-9:

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TO KEEP THE PROMISES”***

I. Begins with Trust. (v. 1)

II. Promises.

III. As We Journey.

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