

Introduction:

- A. Peter Erickson was born in 1859 in Varmland, Sweden, and was married there to Emma in 1885. In the spring of 1886 they emigrated to Milbank in Dakota Territory, and then to a small nearby community called Stockholm. Somewhere around that time, for an unknown reason, they changed their last name to Eklof, then Eclov, meaning Oak Leaf. They raised 12 kids, including Elmer, the grandfather I never met because he died of tuberculosis in 1931. He was known for playing the church organ and would sing hymns on his sickbed. His son was Lyle, my dad. That is where I got the blessing of my Nordic good looks, my love of the land, and my sick voice.
- B. But I, like most of you, have another forefather who is much more famous: Abraham. I am his descendant, not by blood, but by something deeper—a **kindred faith**. Romans 4 explains that all who have the faith of Abraham—who believe God’s promise as Abraham did are his offspring. Paul the rabbi wrote to Roman believers, “**He is the father of us all.** *As it is written: “I have made you a father of many nations.” He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.*” [4:16-17]
- C. **We have begun to explore the life of Father Abraham, the father of our faith in God and his great promise.**
Turn to **Gen. 12.**
- D. As we saw last week, the dark backdrop to Abraham’s bright story was the building of Babel and their towering stairway to reach to the heavens so that their god could be summoned. They wanted to make a name for themselves and keep from scattering so they might be secure and powerful. But the LORD came down, without the aid of their great staircase, and God scrambled their languages and they were scattered after all. Abraham’s story is set in direct contrast to theirs. Abram received from God what the Babel-ers tried to make for themselves. **Gen 12:1-3...**

This is astonishing! The Creator of heaven and earth, the Judge who destroyed the wicked world with a vast flood, and who with a word could splinter one rebellious language into fragments, this LORD God Almighty comes to one man, Abram, with the promise to personally favor his life—to give him benefits only God can give—not only during his life but extending throughout all time and throughout all the world.

I. THE WORLD CHANGED WHEN GOD GAVE ABRAM HIS DESTINY-DEFINING BLESSING (12:1-3)

There are two imperatives—commands—in these verses. The first one is easy to see and, as I said last week, it is the story of every believer’s life. The LORD says, *“Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.”* When God calls you to follow Christ you are also called *out of* the world that had defined you and *to* God’s promised life and land. With that command God gave Abram astounding promises, woven into this magnificent blessing in Gen 12:2-3.

A. In response to Abram’s obedience God promised three blessings. First, ***“I will make you into a great nation.”*** Mind you, this promise is made to a man too old to be a father with a wife who cannot have children. Yet, years later, with a great laugh, Isaac was born, then Jacob, and to him, 12 sons. The nation grew through the dark days in Egypt and the generations who made their home in Canaan. To David and Solomon who put Israel on the map. Then Jesus came and though he never had children he has countless descendants. Listen to **Gal 3:26-29**, *“So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”* A great nation indeed!

God then promises Abraham, ***“I will bless you.”*** God would always *favor* him—keep him safe, beam with

pleasure upon him, give grace to him at every turn; God would always be attentive to Abraham and his family, and grant him peace. Above all other blessings was this: “*Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness*” [15:6]. Abraham was the first to taste this incredible blessing—that without *actually* being righteous God *reckoned* him as righteous because of his faith in God’s promise.

Then God adds, “***I will make your name great.***”

Abraham’s name, of course, is famous all over the world and has been ever since he lived some 4000 years ago. But I think there is more to this than fame. His name is great because he was called the friend of God. He was the man whose faith in the LORD changed the world because he believed and obeyed the promises of the God.

- B. It isn’t obvious in our translations but the next phrase is the second imperative—a kind of happy command: “***and you will be a blessing.***” You *will* be a blessing, right? The sense is that Abraham, so blessed by God, is told to become the agent of God’s blessing. That leads to three ways in which he will be a blessing.

“***I will bless those who bless you.***” We will see that in Abraham’s life. Even those who do not know the LORD, when they are good to Abraham, God is good to them. The result is that Abraham grows ever more blessed, and that spiritual wealth has continued to accumulate to him over 4000 years. Abraham was good for the people he met. He was their gateway to God. He was their lifeline.

On the other hand, God says, “***Whoever curses you I will curse.***” The sense of the word is *to disdain, to regard lightly, of no account*. ‘Whoever writes you off I’ll write off.’ That, too, is a blessing even though it is solemn. This world will be ordered, in God’s good time, by those who welcome God’s grace and those who don’t.

Then this grand, blessed conclusion: “***and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.***” Genesis has already introduced us to these “all peoples” and it wasn’t pretty.

These are the scattered people of Babel, the descendants of Cain, the wayward sons and daughters of man, spread throughout the world. They are incorrigible. Yet in the face of humanity's madness and pride, there stands this promise to Abram: "*all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.*"

Throughout the Old Testament there were evidences of this promise—foreign peoples drawn to Israel's God, like Ruth or the Queen of Sheba, like the magi who came to worship the newborn Jesus. But it was Abraham's greatest Son, Jesus Christ who gave this blessing worldwide impact. **Gal. 3:7-8** says, "*Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.'*" Jesus Christ, Abraham's great Son, is how all nations will be blessed because the gospel has gone out into all the world, and at the great gathering before God's throne, people from every tribe and language and people and tongue will be there to praise God and the Lamb.

- C. So what happened next? Abram began to stake claims on what God promised him. **Vv.4-9...** Abram, Sarai and Lot, along with their large entourage began to move into Canaan, the land God had promised to him. First they come "*the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land.*" That line is a heads-up to later readers, like the Israelites under Moses, entering that same land, that their forefather had faced off against these idolatrous people long before. You see, this "*great tree of Moreh*" was more than a big tree. It was a *teaching tree* where the Canaanites would get messages from their god in the rustling leaves. But there, near the shade of that great tree the LORD actually *appears* to Abram and confirms his promise, "*To your offspring I will give this land.*" As if to say, *One day your descendants will worship me, the Living God, right here and all over this land so pay no attention to this old 'whispering tree.'*

Then Abram moved further south and planted another altar to the LORD and here he “*called on the name of the LORD.*” It might even be said he *preached* the name of the LORD there, I assume in the hearing of the Canaanites. He’d eventually come back to Bethel, where he built another altar to the LORD. He also built one by the great trees of Mamre, near Hebron, a little further south.

Altars to God, like property markers, from north to south through Canaan. This is what it looked like for Abram to begin blessing that hostile land. He planted the flags of God’s ownership in altars of worship. Missions started right there. Abram, Sarai, Lot and a few hundred of their servants bowing around the altars to the LORD in the land God promised to one day give Abram’s offspring.

I read about this organization called “Abraham Path,” where you can hike the routes Abraham may have followed in Canaan. Looks pretty cool, if you’re a hiker, but whether you are or not...

II. WE WALK IN ABRAM’S FOOTSTEPS

- A. By faith in Christ, we are heirs of Abraham and the God-blessed life. We are part of the “great nation” God promised Abraham. 1 Pet. 2:9-10 tells us who we are: “*You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*” Like Abram in Canaan, no one in our world realizes what a great people we are—how rich our heritage, how honored by God’s love, or how bright our future. But that is what we are.

As with Abraham God promises us, “***I will bless you.***” God has seen our faith and given us credit for being righteous. We live under God’s great birthright blessing: “*The LORD bless you and keep you; The LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you, and give you peace.*”

Abraham's faith secured for him a great name, known throughout 4000 years of history, known all over the world. But our faith has secured a name for us as well. Jesus said, "*Rejoice that your names are written in heaven!*" The LORD God knows your name not simply because he knows all things but because he loves you as a son or daughter.

- B. Like Abram, our God-blessed life means we must be agents of God's blessing. "*You will be a blessing, right? You know that must be, don't you?*" When it comes to the God-blessed life someone has reminded us we are not designed to be cisterns but aqueducts. God's blessing is another word for God's grace—his undeserved mercy and favor. Grace must not stagnate in us. I think it was Philip Yancey who wrote, "*The world thirst for grace. When grace descends, the world falls silent before it.*"

God told Abram, "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse." That is still true but even as we hear that what rises within us is the desire for people to know God's blessing and not his curse. We know how patient God is, not wanting anyone to be condemned. We know how patiently he pursued us and how often he's forgiven us and poured out his grace upon us. So that is our desire for those around us. We engage them so God might bless them through us.

When God-blessed people live God-blessed lives among the lost around us, when we built altars in these desolate lands where we live, when we let people hear how we call upon the name of the LORD, they are in the reach of God's blessing; they are near Jesus.