

The blessing of things made right * Genesis 11:27-12:4
November 21, 2021 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

Believe it or not, we are at the end of our 'how it started/how it's going' series and that means that we have reached the end of a very important part of the Bible. The book of Genesis splits pretty neatly into two parts – 1-11 is the 'primeval history' – the earliest history – and 12-50 is the history of the patriarchs – the fathers.

Now that's how scholars define it – primeval history and patriarchal history – but frankly, I think you can also put it like this – God plays defense, God goes on the offensive.

See, in the beginning, God created everything good. Everything was exactly as it should be. Genesis 1 and 2, God makes the heavens and the earth and the birds and the animals. And then He makes people. And by chapter 3, we're in a bit of a tail spin.

First it's Adam and Eve and the Fall, and then Cain kills his brother and then things get so bad that God wipes out the earth and starts anew with the Flood. But even then, evil remained in the hearts of man and before long, we were building a tower into the sky to challenge the Lord for supremacy. And to be honest, it feels a little like God's been playing defense all this time. He responds to Adam and Eve, He responds to Cain and Abel; He responds to the evil in the world with the flood.

But here in chapter 12, God goes on the offensive. In His mercy, He's been biding His time, allowing people to freely make their own decisions and do their own thing, but now He's ready to really start cleaning up this mess. And He's going to do it through a very unlikely candidate – some nobody off in Mesopotamia named Abram.

Turn with me to Genesis 11, starting in verse 27. We're actually going to pick it up here at the hinge between the primeval history and the patriarchal history and think about what God plans to do about this mess we've made. God created all things good – there was peace and harmony and justice - and then humanity came along and turned it upside down; how is God going to turn this thing around and make things right? How will God win back the people who have turned their backs on Him? And this is where the rubber hits the road - am I living in a way that reflects God's restorative actions or am I just contributing to the mess?

Genesis 11, starting in verse 27.

27 This is the account (or toledoth) of Terah. For the people who've been coming to Bible Talk Tuesdays, this is another of the toledoths that we've been talking about. There are seven of these toledoths in the first chapters of Genesis and they focus our attention on what God's doing through particular people and circumstances.

So here's the toledoth of Terah.

Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran. And Haran became the father of Lot.

28 While his father Terah was still alive, Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans, in the land of his birth.

29 Abram and Nahor both married. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah; she was the daughter of Haran, the father of both Milcah and Iscah.

30 Now Sarai was barren; she had no children.

31 Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there.

32 Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Haran.

Now this portion of the Bible is actually pretty indicative of where we're at just before God goes on the offensive. You've got this guy Terah, living in the region of Ur of the Chaldeans (the Babylonians – so Iraq) and despite the fact that God is his Creator and Provider, he has no real interest in God.

How do I know that? Three things – 1. He lives in a region that is well-known for worshiping the moon as a god.ⁱ 2. His name - Terah - means moon. And 3. Joshua 24:2 says that Terah worshiped other gods back in the day.ⁱⁱ

So we've got someone here who is separated from YHWH, the Creator God who made all things and continues to care for all things. And it's not really fair to pick on Terah because most people in his generation were in the same boat. In the words of Genesis 6, every inclination of man's heart was only evil, all the time. And that separated us from God.

But God was not going to allow that to stand. He didn't want to stand by and watch His creation go to hell in a handbasket. He didn't want to wash His hands of it and say – 'oh well, their loss.' No, God intended to do something about it. God had a plan to set things right; to bring human beings back into the life-giving relationship with God that He created us to have.

And we see 'how it started' in Genesis 12.

NIV Genesis 12:1 The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.

2 "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

That's God's game plan. Through one man, He is going to bless the nations.

He says to Abraham – 'leave behind the idolatry of your fathers and come and follow me to a new land where things are good.' And 'I will make you into a great nation and bless you and make you well-known so that you can share those blessings with others. (Now, that must have been a bit of a shock to Abraham, because, as we heard just a minute ago in Genesis 11, he and his wife couldn't have children, but this IS the God of all creation we're talking about). And God finally says to him 'As you go out into the world, I will bless those who are good to you, and those who try to rip you off I will curse, but all in all, I intend to bless the nations through you.'

That's God's plan to make things right – to start with one family and make them into a whole people so that God can bless ALL people through them. It's a bit like army tag – you start with one and then as the next person is tagged, they become 'it' too, and the next people they tag are 'it' too and before long you've reached everyone involved. This is how God planned to make things right – by extending the blessing of His grace to all people in the world, through Abraham's family.

Would Abraham play along? Well, yeah. Verse 4 - 4 So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran (Gen 11:27-4 NIV) (but that was ok because in OT times, 75 is the new 40.

That's how it started – That's how God *began* the process of making things right by blessing one man and his family; how did it turn out?

Well, true to His word, God enabled Abraham to have a son, Isaac. And then Isaac had a son, Jacob. And Jacob had twelve sons, who became the twelve tribes of Israel. And then Israel went into Egypt, in time became slaves, but then God brought them miraculously out at the Exodus as a brand new nation, Israel.

And it's true. God made Abraham's name great. He made him into a nation. And the nations that were good to Israel, they experienced God's blessings. The nations that were not on the other hand, experienced God's curses. Just think of all the Egyptians swallowed up as the Red Sea came crashing down.

And Abraham's line continued, it just kept growing and growing. And in fact, if you look at Matthew 1, you can see this family tree growing and growing and growing. Through Ruth and Boaz and David and Solomon and Josiah and Zerubbabel and ultimately to Mary and Joseph.

And this is where things get interesting. Because up until Mary and Joseph's son, the blessings seemed to be primarily material. Certainly, some people of other nations joined Israel in honouring YHWH, but by and large, the blessings were physical. But now though, something new began and God really made good on the promise that He made to Abraham.

If you recall, God said to Abraham in 12:3, 'all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.' It turns out that that's not just talking about Abraham sharing a blessing with the nations; this is how God would restore His fallen Creation to Him.

Because if you look at Galatians 3:8, it says that this was God's way of saying He would redeem His people by faith.

8 The 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."

9 So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

The blessing that God promised was the blessing of fellowship with God that we lost when we turned our backs on Him. When God promised 'all people on earth will be blessed through you,' the blessing He was talking about was the blessing of being forgiven and restored to relationship with God.

See, sin separates us from God. What happened to Adam and Eve at the Fall is an illustration of what happens to each of us when we ignore Him. We get kicked out of the garden as it were; we create this gap between us and Him that WE could never fill.

But God is so full of love, so rich in mercy that He chose to bridge the gap Himself. To pay the price for our rebellion and to reconcile us to Himself by grace, through faith. The blessing that God ultimately

promised to Abraham, to be shared with the world, was the Gospel. Forgiveness, freely given, all by faith. We, who were sinners, become the children of God.

When God said to Abraham, 'I will bless the nations through you,' He was anticipating the day that He would come to earth, to be born in a stable, to die on a Cross, to conquer the grave and rise again, so that we could be restored to God, if we only trust Him to do it.

That's how God plans to turn things around – to forgive their sin, to restore them to Him, then to give us and new heart and a new start, to live in the world with the kind of sacrificial love that He Himself first loved us with. The sins of Adam and Eve and Cain and Lamech and Terah and Abraham and every person who has ever lived, paid for by the blood of Jesus, so that we can then become agents of reconciliation, extending the grace of God into the world.

That's how it all started; how's it going? Are you living in light of the blessing of restoration? Or are you contributing to the mess? What went on in Abraham's time goes on today – people take advantage of others, they seek their own interest and they tell God to mind His own business. We just keep finding new ways to sin and separate ourselves from God. And the conflict and injustice and self-centredness that we see in the world is the result.

But God made this promise to Abraham, and fulfilled His promise through Jesus, to bless the nations, to restore us to Himself, not by being good, but by trusting God, so that we can become an agent of God's blessings to the world. Army tag. Abraham tagged somebody who tagged somebody who tagged somebody with God's blessing who tagged me; am I going to keep it to myself or pass it along?

God has graciously restored us to Himself; He has begun the work of making all things new. He is even now spreading the Good News of the promise to Abraham to the rest of the world so that as many people as possible can escape the darkness of sin and live in the light of God's grace. Are you living in light of reconciliation? Or contributing to the mess? Are you living in sin and error pining, or has your soul felt its worth in light of Jesus' appearance?

As we come up to Christmas this year, I want you to see that this is God keeping His promise. He said to Abraham that He would bless the nations and the ultimately goal of that blessing was taking what was broken by the fall and putting it back to 'very good.' The baby in the manger is the fulfilment of that promise – God forgiving sin and make things right. If you have believed and received God's salvation, then you're part of the solution, sharing the blessings of God with others and shining a light so that others can see God too. Abraham proves to us that God blesses the nations through people who will let Him; let's be the kind of people that God uses to draw them nearer to Him.

ⁱ Tremper Longman, *Genesis* (The Story of God commentary), 159.

ⁱⁱ Joshua said to all the people, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Long ago your ancestors, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates River and worshiped other gods.'