



From Genesis to Jesus: God's Plan Genesis 12

This was a painful week, wasn't it? Last Sunday, on the very morning we were talking about why we human beings need saving...about why we do evil, awful things...four Lakewood police officers were being assassinated. Our prayer vigil on Friday night was a powerful and moving reminder of how desperately we need a savior. But what **exactly** is it we need saving from? Genesis 3 tells us. The core issue of what is wrong with us...the central thing from which we must be saved is this: **we want to be God**. We want to decide what is right and wrong; we want to decide how we should live...or who should not live...we don't want to be told what to do...WE want to be God.

It seemed like such an innocent offense in the Garden of Eden... just a little bite of forbidden fruit. But it was apparently irresistible. The one thing God told Adam and Eve not to do...the **ONLY** thing that was forbidden them in paradise...became the one thing they **HAD** to have. And paradise was lost. Pain and brokenness and rebellion and selfishness...and, yes, even murder entered into the picture.

Think about it: what happens next after Adam and Eve are expelled from the garden? Fratricide! Adam and Eve's firstborn son, Cain, kills his younger son, Abel. Do you get the horror of that? In the very first family the very first child murders the second child out of jealousy. Horrible! And with each new generation things get worse. Two chapters later we read, "**The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The Lord was grieved that he had made man on earth, and his heart was filled with pain.**"

How awful! Only five chapters ago, God was getting his hands dirty, creating Adam from the dirt of the ground, Eve from Adam's rib—creating them in his own image—and declaring them "very good." Now God is filled with pain by what the pinnacle of his creation is doing. What happened? Sin happened. The corrosive, destructive, murderous power of sin.

So...what is God going to do about this mess? He could just ignore it...turn a blind eye like the indulgent parent of a spoiled brat who makes threats she never intends to carry out. Or he could swing the other way—wipe out the whole bunch and start over. What he **decides** to do is almost that radical. What? A great flood of judgment that destroyed most of the now rotten creation. But bobbing around in those waters was a Grace-Boat containing one righteous man and his family...and a few of their closest pets. Name? Noah. With Noah and company, everyone will have a fresh start, right? Wrong. It turns out that the virus has been passed on even through this righteous man. And the cycle of sin begins all over.

Murder... rebellion...wickedness...death...drunkenness...arrogance...not a bad set of bad accomplishments for just the first 11 chapters of humanity. It quickly becomes clear that humanity cannot save itself. Even the best of humanity cannot save itself. Left to itself, humanity only gets worse. And God seems to realize he has only two choices left. He could wipe **EVERYONE** out and start over—but after the flood, God doesn't seem to want to go that route. In fact, he promises he will never do that again. So if humanity can't save itself, and if God won't just wipe the slate utterly clean, **AND** if he isn't willing just to ignore the corruption of sin in the world...what is left?

Redemption. God decides to do the work that humanity cannot do. God decides that **HE** will save his beloved but flawed creation. This morning our saving God hatches a plan to redeem the whole world. It will take hundreds of years to unfold...God is a very patient God...but it starts in one place with one man. A man named Abram. (Read Genesis 12:1-7)

Ur was in what is now southern Iraq situated on the Euphrates River. It was a prosperous, highly developed civilization. They were sun and moon worshippers. Abram father, Terah, did. And Abram probably did, too. But one day, out of the blue, the God who **created** the sun and the moon—who spoke them into existence—spoke again. To Abram. By why him? Why here? Why not a pyramid builder in Egypt or a fisherman on the Mediterranean coastline? Only God knows, but we do know this much: it had nothing to do with how qualified Abram was for the job.

For reasons we can't imagine, God rolls out his plan of salvation: **“The Lord said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.”** There. That’s it. Leave. Leave your country, your people, your father’s household. The salvation of the world began with a call to leave...to leave almost everything behind.

Raise your hands: how many of you remember a time when you had to leave a place that you really loved? Maybe you were laid off. Or transferred. Maybe you were military. Or your four years at university ended and it was just time to get on with your life. When you walk away from a place that has been so good for you...a place where you have grown and loved and been loved and had fun...it is painful and costly.

But at least you knew where you were going, right? Most of you? Any of you ever leave and head for parts unknown...you had no idea where you were going to end up...you just knew you had to go? **“Leave your country, your people, your father’s household ...and go (where???) to the land I WILL SHOW YOU.”** Did you see that part? Leave...and Go! No MapQuest. No address. Just, “Go to the land I will show you.” Leave and go. That’s it. For you concrete-sequential types, how would you like **those** skimpy marching orders?

But God isn't quite done. **If** Abram will obey, God will bless him. You know...this is something God has wanted to do since he created humankind. Remember these words from Genesis 1: **“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in numbers; fill the earth and subdue it.’”** God has ALWAYS longed to bless humanity with the best of life. He still does.

But it is Adam and Eve’s rebellion that breaks the blessing. And for 8 more chapters, humanity continues to resist God doing what he most wants to do...pronounce his saving blessing upon us. But God doesn't give up. He’s going to try again with Abram. And what a blessing it is: **“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. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”**

In case you weren't counting, that is a seven-fold blessing. What does seven mean in the Bible? Completeness; perfection; abundance. This is an extravagant blessing. And... what part does Abram play in this blessing? Nothing! Who is blessing? God. How much of it is God doing? All of it. **I will make...I will bless you; I will make... I will bless you...I will bless...I will curse...** The “I’s” have it. This salvation story is all about God. All about his initiative, his love, his longing to save and bless...in an apparently hopeless situation. **God** is going to take Abram and Sarai...and do all these things through them and for them.

But did you notice that last promise? In Hebrew literature, they always save the best for last. Listen: **“...and ALL peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”** This is the most important blessing of all. God isn't calling Abram and Sarai for their own sake...he isn't blessing them for their own sake...he isn't making them a great nation for their own sake...why is he doing this stuff? Because he wants to bless the world. He wants to save the world. He is blessing and saving Abram and Sarai because he wants to use them to bless and save the whole world.

Now...how will this one man and his family bless the entire world? I'll give you a hint. (Whisper) CHRISTMAS! 2000 years later one of Abram’s descendants...a girl named Mary...will give birth to a son. His name will be Jesus... which means “the Lord saves” ...and he will die... and RISE AGAIN ...to save all of God’s fallen creation. “For God so loved the WORLD that he gave his one and only Son...” That one son...born 2000 years later...would be Abram and Sarai’s redemptive legacy to the fallen world. But they would never see it. All they had was God’s promise that it would happen...IF they would leave and go.

But there were still a couple of *tiny* hurdles. We get a hint in chapter 11. It’s a list of Noah’s descendants ending with Abram and his family. Who married whom, etc. Pretty dry stuff. But right in the middle is a little landmine. We don't even KNOW it's a landmine when we first step on it. But you'll see why: (29-30) **“The name of Abram’s wife was Sarai...now Sarai was barren; she had no children.”**

HOW is God going to bless the people of the whole earth? Through his offspring. His family. His children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren...you get the point. So what is the problem? Abram's wife, Sarai, is barren. No children. Furthermore, she's old. Not only are her periods a thing of the past; her hot flashes are a thing of the past. God picks this couple out of the blue...tells them to leave everything they know and to go to a place they don't know...AND he promises to make of them a great nation...WHEN THEY DON'T EVEN HAVE ONE KID YET! AND SARAI IS TOO OLD TO **EVER** HAVE A KID!

So...if the world is going to be saved...who is going to do it? Who must do it? God. Only God can do this thing. Only God can make a nation out of a barren, old couple. Only God can raise up a savior to redeem a self-destructive world. Only God.

And one last little problem with this plan. God decides to move Abram and Sarai to a new place to start this work of salvation. God is going to build a new nation that worships Him alone and he will do that in a new place. A nice, empty, fertile place with no one living there, right? Wrong. Who was living there? Canaanites. Some of the most brutal, vicious, idolatrous pagans in the world. These people burned their own babies in sacrifice to their gods. Maybe it was a good thing that God **didn't** tell Abram where they were going. If he had, Abram might have said "Mmmm...I don't think so."

But God invited. And in verse 4, we hear the response. "**So Abram left...**" That's it. The most endearing thing about Abram is his enthusiastic faith. God called and Abram left. He didn't know where he was going. He didn't know how brutal were the inhabitants there. He had no idea how he and his barren, old wife were going to produce a great nation. But God called...and they went. And God's world got saved.

Last week we found ourselves in the story of Adam and Eve. Their sin...their problem... is our sin. WE, too, want to be God. From that instinct only God can save us. This morning, we must find ourselves in Abram and Sarai, too. Otherwise, it's just an interesting story. Maybe it is here: God called one person... one family in one place at one time to be used to bless and save the world. Against all odds...against all improbabilities...they believed God and said yes.

God **STILL** calls one person...one family at a time to bless and save the world. Guess who? You! You may feel utterly unqualified... you may feel barren and hopeless and worthless. And God says, "Great. Then you won't take any credit for what I'm going to do." But it **will** require **one** thing of you. Leaving and going.

On Thanksgiving we heard the story of Lorraine and her grandson Danny and how a group of Chapel Hill men made a huge difference in their lives. A safe place to live, a grandma having custody instead of drug-addicted parents. Their house **AND** their lives were transformed by a group of men who thought they were coming to do a few repairs on a mobile home. Dean and Mike shared... sometimes with tears...how God had called them to do this. It all started with hauling off a pick-up load of shingles. That's all. It turned into something much bigger, much more complicated, something that was really beyond their abilities. But it wasn't beyond God's.

And because they were willing to leave and go, God used them. To save Danny...and Lorraine...one little part of his broken creation. And I think it saved Dean and Mike and the rest of those men, too, in a way. It is God's salvation story on a tiny scale; in our neighborhood with people we know and love. When God asks you to go, go! It is one of our 5 G's, remember. It may involve one errand with a load of shingles. But you never **really** know what God is planning to do.

Leave and Go. Will you? Can you? Maybe not from your home in Gig Harbor to an unknown distant land. (But who knows—that **MAY** be what he requires.) But there is always something God is calling us to leave behind. A bad habit. A destructive relationship. A false religion of horoscopes or do-goodism or bank-accountism. Or a self-centered Christianity that has never cared about saving anyone but yourself. **Your life will end before God is finished calling you to leave the next thing behind so that you might follow him where he is wants to take you.** What is God calling you to leave?

But count on this. **If you choose to stay in Mesopotamia, you will remain barren and hopeless.** And if you go to Canaan, it might be dangerous. There are Canaanites out there! There are brutal, evil people and forces who do horrible things; who take innocent lives; who cheat and hurt and destroy. It feels safer to hunker down. But if God's people will not rise up...if God's people will not continue to go into coffee shops and mingle with broken, dangerous people, God will never get done what he wants done. He will never bless and save and redeem this broken world. What is God calling

you to leave? Where is God calling you to go? It might be costly. It might be risky. And it might do more to save the world than you can even imagine.

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Think about the mess that has occurred in the first 11 chapters of Genesis... murder, rebellion, wickedness, death, drunkenness, and arrogance. Humanity can't save itself, and God promised He won't just wipe the slate utterly clean as He did in the story of Noah. Humanity must be redeemed, but how? Read Genesis 12.
2. What did God ask Abram to do? What was Abram's response? Has God ever asked you to do something you didn't feel qualified for?
3. What made God's plan so unlikely, and how did it involve Abram & Sarai? How did that plan of redemption affect the entire world?
4. What is God calling you to leave? Where is God calling you to go? It might be costly... it might be risky... and it might do more to save the world than you could ever imagine.