

Blessed to be a blessing - UPC 11th September 8.30am

Genesis 12:1-9

The call of Abram

The Lord had said to Abram, 'Go from your country, your people and your father's household 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.^[a]

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.'^[b]

⁴ So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. ⁵ He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

⁶ Abram travelled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷ The Lord appeared to Abram and said, 'To your offspring^[c] I will give this land.' So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him.

⁸ From there he went on towards the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord.

⁹ Then Abram set out and continued towards the Negev.

Ephesians 1:1-14

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,

To God's holy people in Ephesus,^[a] the faithful in Christ Jesus:

² Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Praise for spiritual blessings in Christ

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he^[b] predestined us for adoption to sonship^[c] through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, ⁹ he^[d] made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfilment – to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

¹¹ In him we were also chosen,^[e] having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, ¹² in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. ¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory.

Galatians 3:13-14

¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole."^[a] ¹⁴ He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

Blessed to be a blessing.

I want to share on the theme of being blessed to be a blessing.

The blessings God gives us are intended to be shared with all, beginning with the incredible blessing of salvation from sin and including all the other good things the Lord has given to us.

Many of us have been greatly blessed. So many of us have been given so much: material goods, adequate incomes, families, friends, jobs, homes. And that's just for starters.

As Christians whatever our circumstances, we've been given the greatest gifts: faith, hope and love. And we have been blessed with the means of grace and the hope of glory.

Reflecting on the death of Queen Elizabeth the Supreme Governor of the Church of England, we take comfort in knowing that this is something she knew, she knew that she was blessed to be a blessing.

Even before her coronation in her Christmas broadcast in 1952 she asked for prayer 'Pray for me ... that God may give me wisdom and strength to carry out the solemn promises I shall be making, and that I may faithfully serve Him and you, all the days of my life.'

At the heart of the coronation service / ceremony is the anointing, when the symbols of royal status are removed. The Queen, sitting under a canopy to hide the sacred moment from the cameras, was dressed in a simple white dress with no jewels or crown. As the Archbishop anointed her with oil, the prayers said over her invited God's Holy Spirit to set her apart as God's servant.

As Christians we believe that God's anointing fills us with his love and empowers us to follow him.

The theme of service runs throughout the coronation and, during the Queen's long reign, she has been inspired by the sacrificial life of Jesus Christ, who said of himself: he 'did not come to be served, but to serve'.

She knew and understood that to be blessed to be a follower of Jesus Christ, meant that her reign would mean seeking to be a blessing to this church, this nation, the commonwealth and all peoples and all nations.

She said “For me the teachings of Christ and my own personal accountability before God provide a framework in which I try to lead my life”.

In 2008 the Queen said: ‘I hope that, like me, you will be comforted by the example of Jesus of Nazareth who, often in circumstances of great adversity, managed to live an outgoing, unselfish and sacrificial life ... He makes it clear that genuine human happiness and satisfaction lie more in giving than receiving; more in serving than in being served.’

What an example the Queen has given us as we seek to understand these scriptures this morning

As we heard in Ephesians 1:13-14

¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession – to the praise of his glory.

In Christ we have been given everything that is eternally worthwhile.

(R.C. Sproul puts it this way) “In Christ we find a Priest, a Prophet and a King. Unlike the Old Testament prophets who faced the people when speaking for God, the Old Testament priests faced God and had their backs to the people. Like the prophet, the priest was a spokesman, but he spoke for the people rather than to them.” We also find a King that unlike human kings is incorruptible. Christ is the perfect King, the perfect Prophet, and the perfect Priest. He is the biggest blessing we as humans can have.

So, this might lead us to the big question, “Why?” Why have I, why have you, been so blessed?

The answer to that question is found in our reading from Genesis 12:2-3.

“I Will Bless You, You Will Bless Others”

In the opening verse of Genesis 12 the Lord tells Abraham, **“Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you.”**

Abraham went, and God blessed. But this isn’t the whole story. For we need to read the rest of the sentence.

Here’s how it continues: **“I will bless you,” God says to Abraham, “and you will be a blessing. . . . and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you”** Genesis 12:2-3.

God’s promise to bless Abraham is accompanied by a further explanation. His blessing of Abraham is just the first step in a much bigger plan to extend that blessing through Abraham to all the earth’s peoples.

So, let’s think about what this statement says to us regarding God’s intentions.

The fuller expression of God’s promise points to his greater plan for the world. God certainly intended to bless Abraham and his descendants, but he never meant his blessing to be exclusive.

God singled out Abraham (and later his physical descendants, the nation of Israel) as a first strategic step in what God always determined would be a world-embracing plan of salvation.

In other words, God’s selection of Abraham (and Israel)—his choosing them out of a mass of humanity who had drifted far from him—was a tactical move. It was a means to an end, rather than the end itself.

Supremely, Israel was the instrument God chose to give his Messiah, his Servant, to the world, his Chosen One, who would be the means of salvation for everyone.

The New Testament makes this very clear in a few wonderful verses in Galatians

Galatians 3:13-14

¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.”^[a] ¹⁴ He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

Reading this again from “The message” translation.

¹³⁻¹⁴ Jesus Christ redeemed us from that self-defeating, cursed life by absorbing it completely into himself. Do you remember the Scripture that says, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”? That is what happened when Jesus was nailed to the cross: He became a curse, and at the same time dissolved the curse. And now, because of that, the air is cleared and we can see that Abraham’s blessing is present and available for non-Jews, too. We are all able to receive God’s life, his Spirit, in and with us by believing—just the way Abraham received it.

So, this promise shows us God’s heart. It reveals that God’s love has always been for the whole world, and his plan was always to offer salvation to all the world’s peoples.

Through this blessing to Abraham which is now ours in Christ Jesus, the mandate to see this blessing passed onto every tribe and nation is now the task of the Church.

Matthew 28:18-20

¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the

Holy Spirit,²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

So, God intends to bless all peoples, he started with Abraham, but he made it clear in doing so that Abraham, and the people Israel after him, were to be the instruments through whom God would eventually bring a way of salvation that would be for all peoples on earth.

We can talk about the “Top Line, & Bottom Line” of this blessing

The noted missionary writer Don Richardson has referred to these twin promises in Genesis 12 as top line (“I will bless you”) and bottom line (“and you will be a blessing”). They remind us that everything we have received from God is ultimately to be used for the benefit of other people – especially those who don’t yet know him.

All of this has been summarized in the phrase, “Blessed to be a blessing.” This idea is actually one of the most crucial principles in the whole Bible. The concept of “blessed to be a blessing” teaches us something very basic about God’s expectations for each of us. It’s not just about Abraham, it’s about you and me.

This is a fundamental statement of purpose that applies to everyone who through faith has become part of the people of God. The blessings God gives us are intended to be shared with all, beginning with the inestimable blessing of salvation from sin and including all the other good things the Lord has given to us.

I wonder if we’re in danger of so concentrating on the top line—all the good things God has given us—that we forget the bottom line, and the bottom line is this: we have been blessed *to be a blessing*.

How can you get involved?

1 – *Going*: There are many unreached tribes and many languages that do not have a bible nor translators working on one. I am sure that there is a place on this earth that your profession or trade can be used as a door to share the gospel.

2 – *Praying*: That which helps missionaries bear the afflictions or struggles are the prayers of the saints all over the world. Adopt a country or a missionary and pray for them two minutes every day. It only takes two minutes.

3 – *Giving*: World missions are possible thanks to those that give so that others can go. It is not necessary to be rich to give a few pounds every month to a missionary. What to you is some change to him is an answered prayer.

4 -*Mobilizing*: Behind every missionary there is a group of people working to take care of him. There are no lone rangers in missions.

The Christian song writer Keith Green who was tragically killed in an air crash used to say.....

“If you don’t have a definite call to stay here, you are called to go”

He also said “Jesus call us to go but we go the other way!”

So, let’s not forget the top line or the bottom line, the top line—we have been blessed, think on all the good things God has given us —but let’s not forget the bottom line, and the bottom line is this: we have been blessed to be a blessing.

In 2012 The Queen concluded her Christmas broadcast by praying for her people and inviting a practical, servant-hearted response to Jesus Christ’s message of love:

‘This is the time of year when we remember that God sent his only son “to serve, not to be served”. He restored love and service to the centre of our lives in the person of Jesus Christ. It is my prayer this Christmas Day that his example and teaching will continue to bring people together to give the best of themselves in the service of others. The carol, “In the Bleak Midwinter” ends by asking a question of all of us who know the Christmas story, of how God gave himself to us in humble service:

What can I give him, poor as I am?

If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;

if I were a wise man, I would do my part...

'The carol gives the answer, 'Yet what I can I give him – give my heart'.

Throughout her long life, Christ's example and teaching have been seen acted out in the dutiful and faithful life of our servant-hearted Queen. It seems that her prayer from the start of her reign has been answered.

She knew that she had been blessed to be a blessing.