

The Perfect Gift-Giver

Genesis 12:1-4

Andrew Kneeland, December 13, 2020

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

What do you want, more than anything? If you could have *anything*, what would it be? Would you want a new car? Or maybe a remodeled kitchen? The newest iPhone?

Or maybe you would want the ability to read faster. Wouldn't that be fun? To be able to read ten times faster than normal? Or maybe your one wish would be to golf better. Or maybe to invest with perfect wisdom.

We all have a wish list, don't we? I'm sure you've been asked about it this Christmas season! A wish list of things that we want, things we may think we need, things that we are convinced would make our lives better?

We can think up some pretty fun stuff. But God has a better list. God's wish list for us is so much better than anything we could dream up. You might think you know what you need. God knows better.

Our sermon text is from the book of Genesis. Genesis 12:1-4. This is the call of Abram, who would become Abraham.

READ GENESIS 12:1-4, PRAY

These verses are called the Abrahamic Covenant, and they are some of the most important words spoken in the entire Old Testament.

With these simple words to an ordinary man named Abram, God, like a loving father, promised to address his children's greatest needs.

Before we dive into what those needs are, though, let's put on a wide-angle lens and just notice all that's going on.

A big thing happened here in Genesis 12. The course of human history would be forever changed because of these promises spoken to Abram. Christians, Muslims, and Jews all trace their origins back to Abraham as the father of their faith, which means that over 4 billion people today look at this story in Genesis 12 and see it as monumentally important.

These are important verses. To the Christian, though, these verses have precious meaning. These verses are where God establishes His people, where He sets into motion His plan to rescue sinful humanity. This is where it starts.

We don't know a lot about Abram before this, before he received this call from God, and we don't know a lot about the place he came from. But we do know that Abram was absolutely unqualified to have God establish a direct connection with him. Abram was absolutely unqualified to receive these gracious promises from God.

But this is not unusual. The way God dealt with Abram here in Genesis 12 is the way God deals with each of us. Undeserved grace, to an undeserving sinner, from the Perfect Gift-Giver.

God makes three promises to Abram in Genesis 12. Three promises that reveal God's loving and gracious heart and meet three of our greatest needs.

The first need that God addresses is our need for SECURITY and COMFORT. Look again with me at verse 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."

This is called the "land promise." God promised to give Abram the land that He will show him, fulfilling Abram's need for security and comfort.

We all want security and comfort, don't we? We like to have job security. Raise your hand if you would *want* to work on a week-to-week contract. Income security is a blessing. I don't know of anybody who would *want* to have empty cupboards. Or clothes that don't fit.

We all want security and comfort, and we all work very hard to achieve security and comfort. There's nothing wrong with that, but are you making your security into an idol? Are you investing all of your energy into pursuing safety, security, and comfort, while your family's spiritual life suffers? While your spiritual life suffers?

God wants to give you the gift of true and ultimate security and comfort, but he wants to do it in a much better way than we ever could.

Just look at Abram. He was a wealthy man who had lived a long and successful life. He had financial freedom to do whatever he wanted, he probably had great security and safety from any threats or dangers, and I'm sure he and his wife Sarai lived in great comfort.

But what did God call this 75-year old husband and his 65-year old wife to do? To leave his home, to leave his family, to leave his earthly security and comfort, and to go to an unknown location.

God called Abram to abandon the local cults and idols found in his country. He called him to leave the physical protection and security provided by his kindred, or his family. And he called him to leave his father's house, which probably meant walking away from a large inheritance.

God wanted to give Abram true security and true comfort. He wanted to lead them to the Promised Land. A land that was flowing with milk and honey, a land that God would prepare for them and their children, and a land that God would *lead* them to.

And you know what? God wants to give YOU the gift of true comfort and security, too! He might not call you to leave your home or your family, but God wants to give you a Promised Land, too! He is preparing it for you, and wants to lead you to it.

Abram didn't know where he was going, but he trusted God.

Hebrews 11 says: "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going... For he was looking forward to the city which has foundations, whose designer and builder is God."

Later on in that chapter it talks about the descendants of Abraham living in the Promised Land, but desiring and anticipating a *better* Promised Land. Hebrews 11:16 - "But they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city."

Isn't that amazing? God would lead Abram to a particular place called Canaan, the Promised Land, but even Abram knew that God's true gift of ultimate security and comfort was a *spiritual* Promised Land. A heavenly Promised Land that Jesus Himself is building for those of us who believe!

John 14, Jesus says: "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also."

You can't earn a high enough salary, live in a big enough house, or have a large enough retirement account to match the comfort and security that God wants to give you.

The prophecy of Micah 5 talks about the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, but it also talks about the security Jesus provides his children: Verse 4: "And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. **And they shall dwell secure**, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth."

God gives us the gift of true comfort and true security.

The second need that God addresses in these promises to Abram is our need for recognition. Our need to be *known* and *noticed*. Let's read again verse 2, of Genesis 12:

"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."

Whether you admit it or not, everyone likes to be recognized. To be appreciated or thanked for something. Even the most introverted person in the world has a need to be *known* and *noticed*.

A few years ago I was working on organizing a pretty large event. I spent months beforehand working through the logistics, the planning, and all of the details, trying my best to make sure everything would go smoothly and that it would be a successful event.

The event came, and it went off without a hitch. It flowed perfectly, there were no issues. I had done a good job planning the event, but no one knew it. I was very much behind the scenes.

I was yearning for that praise. For someone to acknowledge my work and recognize me. It's a little embarrassing to admit, but can you maybe relate a little bit? Do you find yourself seeking recognition? Starved for a little acknowledgement, or appreciation?

Everyone has a need to be *known* and *noticed*. But even better than all the praise and recognition the world can offer is for someone to be *known* and *noticed* by God. Even better than a banner and a cake with your name on it is the heavenly celebration that happens every time a lost sheep is returned by the shepherd.

God is the Perfect Gift-Giver and he fulfills our need to be *known* by being a *knowable* God!

Our God isn't far-off and distant. He isn't an absent-minded creator who set the world into motion and then checked out. He isn't an inaccessible god who can only be encountered by climbing a mysterious mountain, or by having a mystical experience.

Genesis 12 proves that we have a God who can be known! We have a God who *wants* to be known. Even better than having the eyes of the world turned to you is having the loving, gracious attention of God.

There was a stone tablet discovered some time ago that had a prayer carved into it. A prayer from an Assyrian idol worshiper from 700 or 800 BC. The prayer is a lament, as he tries to appease the gods from a sin that he has committed. But he doesn't know which god is angry, and he doesn't know what sin he has committed.

It's a tragic prayer to read, because this man doesn't know where to turn. He doesn't even know who to cry out to. He believed in gods who were distant and unknowable.

Our God, the true God, is not distant. He is knowable.

John 1 says that "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Just before he was betrayed and arrested Jesus prayed to God, "I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

There is no greater honor than to be known by God. There is no greater distinction than to be loved, and chosen, by God.

God made the childless Abram the father of both the Jewish and the Muslim people, and he became one of the most famous and significant people in the history of the world. Abram is given due credit for his acts of faith and his legacy of faithfulness... but I'm sure he would be the first to tell you that his fame and notoriety are nothing compared to the honor of being *known by God*.

God is the Perfect Gift-Giver and he perfectly fulfills all of our needs.

The third need addressed in this text is found in verse three:

"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."

God has given each of us a need to have purpose. We all want to have an influence on things, to have a purpose and to make an impact or a difference.

God designed us to have a purpose. To be purpose-driven people who strive to accomplish things. We need *something* to do in our lives. We need goals to be accomplished, we need bridges to cross. If we didn't have a purpose, there wouldn't be a point to anything!

God gave Abram's life great purpose. He not only promised to give him a land, and he not only promised to make his name great, but God promised that He would bless all the families of the earth *through* Abram.

God would use Abram as a vessel of His blessing. If you turn with me in your Bibles to Galatians 3 we can see the full extent of the blessings that would come through Abram.

Starting at verse 7: "Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'In you shall all the nations be blessed.' So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith."

When God spoke these words to Abram, when he issued this covenant promise to Abram, he was thinking about you. Sitting here today in your chairs, YOU are "all the families of the earth." YOU are the ones who are blessed through Abram.

It was through Abram that God re-established a personal connection with humanity. It was through Abram that God revealed Himself as a *knowable* and *personal* God. And it was through Abram's family that God would send a great descendant who would live a sinless life and die an undeserving death in order to fully accomplish God's perfect plan of redemption. That's what we're waiting for this Advent season. Waiting for Christmas.

Through Abram, all the families of the earth *were* blessed. But it's not over yet. God wants to give *your* life purpose, too! God wants to fill our need of being purpose-driven people by giving us a tremendous purpose and a tremendous role in His redemptive plan.

Psalms 96 tells us to, "Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!"

This is where we get our true purpose. Where we find our opportunity to have true influence and to make a lasting impact. God's purpose for our lives is that we trust His promises, and that we share His promises with others.

Most of us are familiar with the Great Commission of Matthew 28. Jesus tells his disciples, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." God's plan to reach the lost is by using *you*!

But the original Great Commission is found here in Genesis 12. This is where God revealed His plan to reach the nations with the news about His love, his compassion and forgiveness.

And as we look at verse four we see Abram's obedience to this call from God. His response to God's promises. But this isn't a story about a man's obedience. It's a story about God's graciousness.

The way God deals with Abram is the same way God deals with each of us. God deals with us not by giving us demands, but by giving us promises.

The same God who revealed Himself to Abram, reveals Himself to you this morning. He is here, and He can be known through His Word. We are not saved by making promises *to God*. We are saved by believing God's promises *to us*! Let's trust, and stand on these promises together.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for this Word through which you come to us this morning. You are the Perfect Gift-Giver and you desire to give us great and marvelous gifts through this Word. Grow our faith and our trust in You, and stamp out all unbelief and sin in our lives. May You continue to be praised and glorified this morning, in Your name we pray. Amen.