

## Blessed to Bless

### Genesis 12:1-9

Stories of Genesis: When God Shows Up

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Worship at 8:30, 10, and 11:30 a.m.

May we hear your voice, Lord God of heaven and earth. May we see Jesus, the descendant of Abraham, as the one who carries the blessing. May we hear the voice of your Spirit. Help us to receive your blessing and carry it into a world that is cursed. May you speak to us now in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. The Ashanti tribe of Africa has a proverb: "If you understand the beginning well, the end will not trouble you." There are two beginnings in the book of Genesis. There is the beginning when God creates the heavens and the earth, and God declares that all of it is good. Human beings come along for the next 11 chapters and pretty much destroy things. They create a mess out of the good world that God has made. When we finally come to the end of chapter 11 of Genesis, people are dying and there is barrenness. The ultimate image of this is that Abram is a man who has a lot, but has no future children. That is the image of the world: we have a lot, but no future. It is in that context that God speaks to Abram personally. God speaks as the one who brings blessing to him personally. God calls Abram to come out of that world that is cursed, and become a part of a world that God will bless because God's blessed presence is with him. Abram, at 75, is a man at mid-life in those times – a man who supposedly had everything, who was settled-in and stable. But God calls him to go; for blessing always sends people out. If you believe today that you are too old to hear from God and to be a blessing, this message is for you. If you believe that your life is too barren and too disappointing to be a blessing, then this message is for you. If you believe that you have created too much curse, and you have the wake of undoing and destruction behind you, this message is for you. For out of all the curse when God speaks, God will create blessing. In the Hebrew there is a wonderful dual image of the words "blessing" and "curse." They present a picture of the reality of what happens when one is blessed or cursed. The word "blessing" literally means that one stoops down, kneels at the feet of the one who is being blessed and lifts them up. For God to bless Abram is the image of God stooping below Abram, kneeling at his feet and lifting him up. Abram doesn't deserve it. There is no merit in Abram's life. There is nothing to show that he is a special person because he has done wonderful things. God chooses to bless Abram. God chooses to stoop down, to become Abram's servant, and to lift Abram up. Now the opposite picture is also in scripture. Probably the best image of this is in the relationship between Cain and Abel in chapter four of Genesis. The curse is when one rises up and knocks another down – when one rises up over and puts the other person down. It is an act of curse. To rule over and control, to attack and oppress, to exclude and to enslave – these are acts of curse. What God is clearly saying to us in the experience of Abram is that God will not rise up and kill Abram; God will stoop down and lift him out of his cursedness, his misery, and loss, and barrenness, and will lift him to a place of blessing. Only God can do that. There is no way that we can lift ourselves from under the curse. We are not blessed because we are gifted and talented. We are not blessed because we are good looking. We are not blessed because we are brilliant; we are not blessed because we are born wealthy. We are not blessed because we have done well in life and are successful. None of those things is the source of blessing. They may be the results, but we cannot claim ownership for any of it. You are not who you are because you have made yourself. Blessing clearly comes only from God. You are who you are, and blessed in any way, because God has made it possible for you to be blessed. Another proverb from the African the Baramba people tells us, "God gives nothing to those who keep their arms crossed." Abram was able to receive God in his life. Abram was able to hear God speak to him. Abram was willing to receive the blessed presence of a God who could pour out love toward him. Some of us close ourselves off from God. We don't want to hear from God; even if God were to speak to us we would deny it. We shut out God's voice, and we stay so busy that we cannot be quiet to hear the still, small voice. We would keep our arms crossed, and dare God to intervene. Abram received the blessing of God. He listened to God, and he carried it. It is clear throughout scripture that the only blessing that exists on the face of the earth is the presence of the living God. That's it. God, himself, is the blessing. For Abram to be blessed, it is because God walks with Abram. God is good; God is gracious. God is kind and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in steadfast love. Abram learns about who God really is as he walks with God along the way. God is the one who brings blessing because God is the blessed presence. Blessing is not about the reward. For example, when God promises Abram that he will have a son, the blessing is not the son. When God promises that the generations of those who follow him will receive the land, the blessing is not the land. Those are fruits of the promise. The blessing is God in the midst of Abram's life. The blessing is God in the midst of the caravan that goes from one place to another and stops along the way. Sometimes in our world today, we get confused. We think that the land is the blessing, or the children are the blessing, or the success is the blessing. No – the blessing is the presence of God. Abram needed to invest in God's presence. He needed to be able to open himself up and say, "God, come and be with me and speak to me. Walk with me." And because God has taken the initiative, Abram is able to go into a world that is cursed and be a blessing. Abram goes into the world as a blessed man the way that God has come to Abram – not as one who goes to conquer and control, manipulate and intimidate, to make people bow down to him. No. Yet another African proverb of the Aruba people says, "Go softly into the world. Go softly. If it is harmed, it cannot return. Go softly into the world." Abram goes softly, because God has come softly to him. Blessing comes because a person is willing to come as a servant, to be able to submit himself to others around. Abram goes into Canaan not to demand; he goes there not to oppress and conquer people. He goes there to serve the Canaanites who are pagans. He goes there to serve the cursed people, because God has come to Abram to serve him. Abram carried the blessing softly, not harshly. The essence of the blessing is that Abram literally walked with God. Your life will be a blessing to the degree that you walk with God. If you do not walk with God, your life will not be a blessing. No matter how successful, how talented and gifted you are, if you do not walk with God, your life will not be a blessing. Because the essence of blessing is: when people see you, they see the living God in relationship to you. Blessing is walking with God. And it is God blessing us and increasing the blessing, as we go and we grow. Blessing changes us over a period of time. The journey transforms us, not because we are going through so many difficulties of life, but because God is with us in the midst of dealing with life. We grow as God ministers to us on the way. It is obvious that if Abram did not go, he would not be transformed and changed into the blessing of God. If you are facing a movement in your life where God is inviting you to take off and take a risk, and venture out, and you choose not to go, then God will leave you behind. Fortunately, God is patient and kind. God will keep working with you until you probably decide to go. But don't expect a blessing if you won't listen to the movement. When we come and celebrate the Lord's supper today, we say that this moment is a celebration of the real presence of Jesus. We are not blessed because there is grape juice and bread there. We're not blessed

because there is a table and people serving. We are blessed because Jesus is present, and Jesus is serving the meal. That real presence is what makes us a blessing. It is the real presence that we receive when we participate in the meal, that Jesus is really given to us – who he is and what he is. The Lord is present all of the time; but there are certain moments where God is present in specific ways. The Lord is present with us all of the time, but we celebrate the moment of communion as a sacramental moment because we re-live and remember the moment when Jesus was with the disciples and Jesus' presence permeated the disciples. The very giving of bread and wine is a sharing of the presence. God shows up in your life at specific times. Can you remember those times when God has spoken to you, or God has shown the glory of God to you? When you have sensed a movement or an invitation, or a command to go, that is when God is visibly present. As I look back on my life, I can think of those times when God was physically present and spoke to me. There was a time when I was three years old, in the front room of our apartment. There was a time when I was walking in the fields when I was 15 and heard God speak. There was a time when I was 30 and in a worship service and heard God speak. There was a time when I was sitting in a movie theater, of all places, and God spoke. Remember the times when God speaks. Those are the moments where you build the altars, and to remember that God is walking with you along the way and helping you to grow. God wants to speak to you, and to invite you to be in God's presence so that your life is blessed. When Abram was blessed by God, he showed the blessing to other people. He did not try to control them, or manipulate, or intimidate them, or oppress them. He went and served people whom he encountered along the way. One of the great examples of this is his encounter with Melchizedek, the King of Salem, the Prince of Peace. When Abram, after a tough battle with enemies, wins that battle, Salem is the place where Melchizedek and Abram exchange blessings. Abram shows the blessing of God in his life when he gives Melchizedek ten percent of everything he owns. Not because Melchizedek demands it, but because Abram says, "God has given it to me; I want to give it to you." Melchizedek shows the blessing of God in his life when he gives Abram the sharing of bread and wine, to show that God's presence is in Melchizedek's life. We are blessed by God because God is present with us. It is important that when the Lord leads us, we are being led into a place that is not an easy place. We are being led into a world like Abram's that is full of Canaanites – a culture that is cursed, a people that are cursed, practices of faith that are cursed. And what is the curse? Anything that becomes oppressive, demanding and manipulative. We are called to become a presence of blessing in the midst of that. We are called to confront a cursed environment. We would like to stay inside and be protected and be in a safe place, but we are called to take the sanctuary that we experience here out into the world. To take that blessing that we receive here, and go out into a place that is not blessed. I encourage you, if you have the courage to do so (even though it is a movie that is full of some tough things and some harsh words) to see the movie, "Crash." It is a story about how cursed the world really is, and about how much grace can impact the world in little ways. Jesus has come like God to Abram, to you, to bring a blessing of presence to your life. Are you willing to receive that powerful presence of blessing? Are you willing to go into a world that is cursed and angry and frustrated and bring that blessing? The world was changed by Abram, and the world can be changed by people who follow Jesus Christ if we are willing to carry the presence of God with us. Are you listening for the voice of God? Are you carrying the presence of God as you walk out this door? You are blessed because God is a blessing in your life. Take that blessing and share it with others. Amen.