

The Blessings of The Seed

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- [0 : 0 0] I'll start with a question that you can chat to with the person next to you. How early is too early to get ready for Christmas? Over to you just for a couple of seconds.
- How early is too early to get ready for Christmas? I wonder what you said there, how early is too early? Of course, the main culprits I'm thinking of are the shops, aren't they?
- Woolies and Coles. Around October, maybe even late September, you start seeing fruit, mince pies, decorations, Christmas sales and all that sort of business. I contacted a person this week who lives on one of those streets around Kew and the boulevard.
- You know those streets where all the houses are decorated? He said around November he starts going to the garage and putting all the lights and stapling them to the roof.
- Around November. My son RJ and I, we start preparing in the first weekend of December, which is this weekend. We go to the local scout hall and we pick out a live, you know, the live tree because we love the smell.
- [1 : 0 5] And I love picking pine needles out of the carpet in January. All that business. Surely, surely we can all agree the first week of December is the bare minimum.
- Anything before that and we're still dealing with other things in the year. The reason I'm saying all of this, of course, is that today we're starting our Advent series. And of course, in case you don't know, Advent is a fancy word.
- It comes from the Latin Adventus. It just means coming. In Advent, Christians prepare for the coming of the Messiah. But Advent is tricky for a couple of reasons.
- The first is that he's already come. We've missed his arrival by about 2,000 years. FYI, his name is Jesus. His name is Jesus or Emmanuel.
- He already arrived. He was born in a manger. Shepherds, angels, wise men, gold, frankincense and myrrh. So, you see, Advent is kind of logically redundant as a season because it asks us to prepare for a Messiah who's already been and gone, who's died, risen again and is waiting in heaven.
- [2 : 1 3] And so, for Christians in 2021, shouldn't Advent be preparing for Jesus' second coming rather than one that's already happened?
- That's what Andrew will look at on Boxing Day a little bit later. The other reason Advent is tricky is your fault. And I don't mean, I mean literally you in the room.
- It's your fault. You see, you know your Bible so well, your Matthew's Gospel and your Luke's Gospel, that Andrew and I have to figure out different ways to approach Christmas that are clever and surprising.
- So, this is your fault. So, we're going to look today at the promises to Abraham. And I'm confident that we won't have to crowbar Christmas into the story because the New Testament tells us that Genesis 12 was the gospel announced in advance to Abraham.
- You see, many Christians think the gospel began at Christmas time when angels announced it to shepherds. But it first began when God announced it to Abraham or Abram back in Genesis 12.

[3 : 27] And so, if you think mince pies and decorations is a bit much in October, spare a thought for poor old Abram who started getting ready 1,900 years before baby Jesus arrived.

In our story, God makes unbelievable promises to Abraham and his family. The question will be, can we trust God to keep his promises? It's actually got a double meaning.

There are two sides of that issue. On one hand, can we trust God to fulfill his word? Is he willing and able to do what he says? But on the other hand, can we trust God to keep his promises?

Will we believe God so much that we align our lives around his word? There are two sides of the same trust coin. There are two points on your handouts.

Both of them the same. It's kind of a double question. And what we'll do is we'll see how Christmas surprisingly and cleverly fits into both.

[4 : 33] And so, please have a look down at Genesis 12. The Lord had said to Abram, go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

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 if it curses you, I will curse. And all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

Here are some amazing promises. But they're also very remote. You see, even if we've heard of Abraham, we certainly don't know Abram. Promises to bless him, make his name great.

What do I care about that? It's all very remote from us. Why should we get excited about a gospel way back then? And the answer is at the end of verse 3.

It says all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. If you in the room, if you are part of all peoples on earth, which I suggest you are, then you are directly affected and included by a gospel way back then.

[5 : 39] A promised land, a great nation, blessings for the world. In this church, we call them LOB, L-O-B, land, offspring and blessings. But we are Gentiles, aren't we?

We are Gentiles and not Jews. It's important to be clear what God is and isn't promising to give people like us. You see, plenty of churches will promise you all of God's blessings now.

But God hasn't promised successful careers and lifelong relationships and healthy bodies. I mean, he hasn't promised us a season of double portions, as I was promised at Planet Shakers Church in the city.

These things sound more like my plans for my life rather than God's promises. And so in Genesis 12, I count three, three promises to Abraham.

Firstly, it's land, verse 7. To your offspring I will give, or your seed, I will give this land. Later on, God calls it the land of milk and honey.

[6 : 46] Or in other words, as I've said once before, the land flowing with caramel. Because when you mix condensed milk and sugar, you get caramel, milk and honey, caramel. A land of luxurious caramel desserts.

What is God's favorite flavor of ice cream? It's not rum and raisin. I don't know why that would be anyone's favorite. But it's luxurious caramel. There you go.

Bit of trivia. Land. First blessing. The second promissory, a numerous offspring. Verse 2. I will make you into a great nation. Later on, God says they will be more numerous than the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore.

In fact, Abraham will have so many offspring, God has to change his name to Abraham. Father of many nations. The final promise in verse 3.

A blessing to everyone. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you. Unfortunately, all of Melbourne couldn't be here this morning. They're all busy out there trying to earn themselves a world of blessings on their own.

[7 : 53] But Genesis says that ultimate life and happiness is tied to a promised land, a great nation, and all of God's blessings.

Land, offspring, and blessings. His promises to Abraham are unbelievable. But they're also unbelievable. Because before we go much further, there are already obstacles in the way.

I wonder if you spotted them. So the land turns out to be Canaan. The only trouble is the end of verse 6. Because surprise, surprise, Canaan is full of Canaanites.

And I guess that's like promising a Jew, the vacant possession of the West Bank in Gaza. How will God deliver that promise? Offspring, the second promise, that seems pretty good.

The only trouble is the end of verse 4. Abram was 75 years old. So I'm 45 years old or thereabouts. And sometimes when our youngest son Samuel is being really cute, my wife and I talk about having another baby.

[9 : 01] But then we remember that he wakes up at 5.30 every morning. And that by dinner time, my wife and I can barely keep our eyes open. And so at 45, I can guarantee you, I'm done.

You heard it? We're done. That's it. But Abram is 75. Anyone 75 or older in the room? Don't raise your hands.

It's fine. Anyone 75 or older fancy having a baby now? Good luck to you, I say. What's more, what's even worse is Abram's wife Sarai, she's about 65.

And sadly, she's barren. She can't have kids. How is God going to make a great nation out of these two pensions? Here is the third obstacle, world of blessing.

World of blessing sounds really great, doesn't it? The only trouble is Abram's world is under the curse of Adam. The only thing that unites all the nations is that everyone sins and dies.

[10 : 04] Unbelievably good promises. But at this stage, they are unbelievable. You see, here are three promises to hang God's faithfulness on.

Can we trust him to fulfill his word? And part of the answer is repeated throughout our passage. God keeps saying, I will show, I will make, I will give, you will be blessed.

God is the one doing all the doing. You see, the other patriarchs, Adam and Noah, they were told to be fruitful and multiply. It was all up to them. But here with Abram, God is the one who will and will and will do all the doing.

We're not really told much about Abram, actually. He just seems to be a random guy out of nowhere. And I think the author does that deliberately to say that if these promises are to come about, God will have to be the one to do it all himself.

And I realize in Australia, we believe in being self-made and self-reliant, taking responsibility for ourselves. But isn't it actually a relief that promises to bless us aren't in these hands or your hands?

[11 : 19] Isn't it a relief that they're in God's hands? The other reason we can trust God to deliver is verse 7. He says, the Lord appeared to Abram and said, to your offspring, I will give this land.

This is the verse that's quoted in the Galatians passage at the bottom. A New Testament reading. You see, the Galatians were a church that were desperately trying to get some of Abraham's blessings.

Because after all, to your offspring, I will give this land. The only trouble is, the Galatians were mainly Gentiles, like us in the room.

And so to break their way into a Jewish family, they tried to follow Jewish laws, such as circumcision. After all, what did all the sons of Abraham have?

But circumcision. And Paul corrects them in verse 16, at the bottom of your handouts. The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed.

[12 : 23] Scripture does not say, and to seeds, with an S, meaning many people, but unto your seed, meaning one person who is Christ. You see, God only ever meant one offspring of Abraham, one person who is Christ.

The plan is that one day, Abraham's greatest grandson would show up. And if you want any part of Abraham's blessings, put your trust in that seed, in that offspring.

And on that first Christmas morning, God sends a baby. A baby he will bring about and usher in and begin all of Abraham's blessings.

You see, before Christmas is anything, it's God keeping his word. It's a real event in history that we can hang these unbelievable promises on.

And when he grows up, his death and resurrection will mend the relationship between a cursed world and the God of blessings. He will open the way to a promised land, a new creation.

[13 : 33] He will extend an invitation to anyone in the world, as long as they put their trust in him. And so all that's left is the other side of the coin.

Can we trust God to do as he says? Can we trust God? And Abram is the one for us to watch.

The Bible calls him the man of faith. In this story, God essentially says, go, and he went. But I want you to notice how much Abraham trusts.

I want you to notice his level of faith. Verse 1, go from your country, your people, and your father's household to the land I will show you. In other words, immigrate from your hometown.

And plenty of people in this room have immigrated to Australia. But they probably knew something of Australian life and what to expect here. Maybe they had family members already paving the way, giving them a place to stay.

[14 : 32] But Abram just takes God's word for it. Act now, based on my word, for a future you can't fully see.

And there's lots of detail showing how much Abraham acted and how much he trusted. Verse 4, Abram was 75 years old when he set out from Haran.

And for anyone of you who's 75 and older, if you don't fancy a baby at your age, how about moving country at your age? See, at 75, you're supposed to be settling down, retiring, not packing up all your things, moving to a foreign land.

Most people, they move from a poor country to a prosperous one for better opportunities and freedom and all that. Abram moves the opposite direction. In verse 5, he risks everything he's acquired, his possessions, the people, everything he's got in Haran, and sets out for Canaan to become a foreigner at his age.

In verse 6, he travelled right through the land, a land that's full of Canaanites. That means he travelled right into the heart of danger, where things were potentially unsafe for him.

[15 : 53] And in verse 8, the place where he finally pitches his tent is so small, it doesn't even have a name. You know country towns in Australia that are so small, you have to describe them by what they're near?

Like Muckleford in Victoria. Anyone know Muckleford in Victoria? Good. Someone at 745 knew Muckleford. I said, put your hand down. If you want to find Muckleford, it's south of Bendigo and north of Ballarat.

You see, it's so small, you have to identify it by what it's near. It's not recognisable on its own. Here's Abram pitching his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east.

He leaves Haran, where he's been successful, and heads to a nameless patch of dirt. Every act of faith, he moves the opposite direction to what we would expect or what he probably wants.

He realigns his whole life, all his wealth, around God's promises. You see, Abram is the example of faith. He's an example of an old man, not too set in his ways, to respond to God's call in his life.

[17 : 12] And at that first Christmas, I wonder if you realise that Jesus himself makes a remarkably similar journey. Jesus was also safely in his father's house.

In his homeland, you could say, where he was prominent and prospered. But God called him to leave, to be a foreigner, as it were.

He even sent Jesus to the same tiny town, east of Bethel, west of Ai, Bethlehem. And like Abram, when his father said, go, Jesus went.

That first Christmas follows Abram's journey of faith. Act now, based on God's word, for a future you can't fully see.

And if Abram's the example of faith, will we trust God the way he did? You see, I wonder if part of the problem is that God has his own timing.

[18 : 15] His promises involve babies and becoming an immigrant when Abram was 75, not 25. It's actually 1900 more years before this offspring of Abram will even show up.

It's opposite to what anyone expects. What's more, Jesus still hasn't answered any of my prayers. After two years, we're still not back to COVID life, sorry, life before COVID.

We're still tapping elbows, which is kind of ridiculous for grown adults, aren't we? After five years, some of my family members still show no interest in Jesus.

After 10 years, my marriage is still struggling with some of the same issues we've had. After 45 years, I'm still battling the same sins I have been all along.

It would be easier to trust God if he worked to my timing and not his own. Perhaps part of the issue, trusting God, is that he works to his own agenda or his own plans.

[19 : 23] You see, our plans don't involve the election of certain politicians, left or right. Our plans don't involve an endless Greek alphabet of COVID virus strains or visits to the hospital that never seem to end.

Or our kids struggling with issues that they can't get past. Or the Anglican diocese being a bit of a mess. Or our finances being only adequate.

Or old age catching us all, as it has done so quickly. These are opposite plans to what we would have planned for our life.

It would be easier to trust God if he worked to our way of things. Abram is a hero of faith because he trusts in God's timing.

He trusts in God's plans, even though they were opposite to what he had expected. He acts now, based on God's word, for a future he can't fully see.

[20 : 26] That is faith, isn't it? And it's staggering because, compared to us, Abram barely knew anything about God. In fact, he has no clue who Jesus is.

Yet it didn't stop him aligning his whole life around these ancient promises. Clearly for Abram, it was never too early to get ready for the coming, or the advent, the Christmas of Jesus and his arrival.

And as the Bible goes on, God will add more and more to these promises of Abram. By the time we get to Moses, they'll include a law and provisions for relationship.

By the time we get to David, they'll include a king and a house forever. By the time Jesus shows up, they'll include forgiveness of sins and a gift of the Spirit.

And even though we are on this side of history, and we know so much more about God's promises than poor old Abram did, the pattern of faith is still the same.

[21 : 31] Leave everything in the world behind for a future you can't fully see. Take me at my word, says God, based on what you know of my character.

And actually, Jesus says a remarkably similar thing. He says, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.

And so stepping out of faith means putting God's agenda, God's plans, his timing, above our own. Stepping out of faith will mean reminding yourself that God's ways are best, that he's in control, and he knows what he's doing, even though the world looks like it's gone mad these days.

Stepping out in faith might mean going in an opposite direction financially, using your holiday money, your Christmas bonus, giving it all away to a mission partner, and going without that year.

Stepping out in faith might mean going in an opposite direction socially, as you end a relationship with someone who, at the end of the day, has been toxic to your walk with God.

[22 : 46] Stepping out in faith means putting all your hopes in a new creation, rather than this creation. Stepping out in faith involves anything where we elevate God's agenda, his promises, his plans, his word, above our own.

And don't worry if you miss out on blessings along the way. People who step out in faith are the children of Abraham. And to the family of Abraham, all the blessings flow.

We in the room, we've seen so much more of God in action. We've got a whole Bible full of promises kept. A lifetime of Jesus in our lives to know that God is good, that he can be trusted.

Like Abram, we're never too old to realign our whole lives around the advent or the coming or the Christmas of the Messiah.

In that sense, it's never too early, is it, to get ready for Christmas. So let's pray that we'd be like Abram, the man of faith. Father God, we thank you that you can be trusted to keep your word.

[24 : 04] Thank you that Christmas proves it. Thank you for a lifetime of promises kept, a Bible full of your word proved true. Please would we trust you the way Abram did.

Please, Father, help us step out in faith, even if your ways move us in opposite directions to our plans for our lives. Thank you that we won't miss out on any of your blessings.

But please, Father, when it's hard to step out in faith, please encourage us by your spirit. Help us to remember our old man Abram and what he has done.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.