

*Blessed*  
**Genesis 12:1-3**

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The Bible tells a story of a beautiful creation that now suffers from the brokenness of a humanity that has turned from God. Because of that turn from God human beings now experience alienation from God and from one another. I am absolutely certain you have seen and experienced the brokenness of human life. I also pray from the depths of my heart that you have experienced the beauty and the goodness of God's creation, and that even in the midst of a broken world you have seen the image of God imprinted on the face of humanity. It is with a sad and deep awareness of the brokenness of our lives and our world coupled with a longing to be restored to a life and relationship with God that is full of beauty and wonder that we come now to what N.T. Wright asserts is God's rescue plan to restore the fullness of creation in the divine image of God. That rescue plan is introduced to us in Genesis 12, with God calling to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go the land I will show you." As strange as it may seem to us, God's plan is introduced with the call to one old man, but the promise is of such magnitude that within just three verses we find out that through this one man, and the nation that will come through him, the blessing of God will come to all nations, to all people, to all creation.

God's rescue plan begins with the promise to Abram that through him, through his name, through his descendants, all peoples on earth will be blessed. The story of Abram begins in Genesis 12 and even though Abraham (his name by that time) dies in Genesis 25, what God began when he called Abraham does not ever come to an end, because from the seed of Abraham would come the tribe of Judah and from the tribe of Judah would come a king named David and from a king named David would come Jesus, the son of Joseph and Mary, who would be the Savior of the world. This wonderful, amazing, life-giving rescue plan begins with Abram and the promise of a blessing for all peoples on earth. So in the context of a blessing for all people, here are at least some of the ways God's rescue plan is put into action.

## **Abraham practices hospitality.**

Genesis 18 tells us Abraham was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day and he saw three visitors standing nearby. We have been tipped off about these three visitors because the passage begins with the words, “The Lord appeared to Abraham.” How does Abraham respond when visitors appear at his tent in the heat of the day? How does Abraham respond when the Lord appears at his tent in the heat of the day? Abraham responds by offering hospitality. “If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way.” (Genesis 18:1-5)

## **Abraham practices intercession.**

When these visitors got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and the Lord said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him.” So the Lord tells Abraham that an outcry has arisen against Sodom and Gomorrah because of their grievous sin, a sin that was not strictly sexual, but rather a sin that played out in acts of injustice, pride, and indifference to the needy. The outcry of the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah has risen to God, a sin that is pervasive, a sin that represents a general disorder of a society organized against God, really a society that is in rebellion against God, and what does Abraham do? What does the one do who will become a great nation and powerful nation, the one through whom all nations will be blessed? Abraham intercedes for this rebellious city and these rebellious people. He stands in the gap and pleads their cause.

Lord, this city truly is wicked, but if there were fifty righteous people, would you spare the city for their sake? For fifty the city will be spared. Forty-five? Forty? Thirty? Twenty? What if only ten can be found? Instead of rejoicing in the judgment, egging God on, playing to the crowd that wants to see enemies destroyed and decimated, Abraham intercedes. The one through whom all peoples would be blessed, all

peoples, all nations, all tribes, and all tongues, the one named Abraham intercedes for a broken, rebellious, wicked, depraved city. He prays for God to be merciful. Surely there is something for us to think about as we live in a world equally broken, equally rebellious, equally wicked, and equally depraved.

### **Abraham practices offering what is most precious in his life to God**

Genesis 22 begins with the words, “God tested Abraham.” He said to him, “Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied. Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.” When the whole story had played out; when Isaac had been bound and laid on the altar of sacrifice; when Abraham had lifted his hand to slay his son; when the angel of the Lord had called out, “Abraham! Abraham!”; when Abraham had answered again, “Here I am”; when the angel of the Lord said, “Do not lay a hand on the boy, for now I know you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son”; when a ram mysteriously appeared in the thicket; when it was all said and done Abraham was able to call God Jehovah Jireh, a name that only those who have offered what is most precious can truly call God. The name means, God provides.

### **Abraham practices laughter**

When those visitors came to his tent and Abraham practiced hospitality, he was almost one hundred years old, and his wife Sarah was closing in on 90. Abraham was out at the front of the tent, being hospitable, and Sarah was in the tent. One of the visitors told Abraham that he would return in a year and Sarah would have a son. These tents were not soundproof. Sarah, on the inside of the tent, heard that she was going to have a son in a year. Sarah had lived nearly 90 years and never even had one single child. We are told Sarah was childless. She is even described as barren. When she heard that she was going to have a son and she thought to herself, “After I am worn out and my husband is old, will I now have this pleasure?” Actually, she didn’t think to herself. She laughed to herself. She burst out in laughter, loud enough that the ones outside the tent heard her laughing. And then when in one year she did

have that son, that son who was the child of the promise, that son whose birth seemed so preposterous it caused her to laugh, well she and Abraham named him Isaac, whose very name means, “He laughs.” The one through whom all peoples would be blessed practiced laughter, a laughter that realized God can truly do the impossible, he can bring life out of death.

### **Ultimately, Abraham practices faith**

In Genesis 15 God is making more promises to Abraham, in Genesis 15 the promise that the descendants of Abraham would be more than the stars in the heavens. In one of the most simple and pure declarations of faith we could ever find, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” (Genesis 15:6) Abraham is the father of our faith.

Earlier I mentioned that N.T. Wright, a contemporary theologian, says that in Abraham God introduces his rescue plan for the world. God’s rescue plan for the world, God’s rescue plan for a beautiful world that is broke, begins with the blessing promised to Abraham. And in the life of Abraham, in the things he practices, we see hints and promises of how God is already at work to rescue, to repair, and to restore a world that is broke. N.T. Wright’s point is not that Abraham himself is the rescue plan, but rather that by tracing the plan through Abraham and his descendants, the children of Israel, the covenant relationship God establishes with them, when we experience the depth of God’s faithfulness as it unfolds in the story of the Old Testament, our eyes are opened and our hearts prepared to receive Jesus as the full and complete embodiment of God’s rescue plan.

When Jesus comes he is the fulfillment of God’s rescue plan.

- Jesus practiced hospitality, in the way that he welcomed and reached out and made room for and took time with so many different people. He practiced hospitality when he said, “Come unto me all who are weary and heavy laden.” He practiced hospitality when he said, “Let the children come unto me.” And he taught us to practice hospitality with the words, “Whatever you do to the least of these you do unto me.”

- Jesus practiced intercession, interceding on behalf of the least, the last, and the lost when he walked the earth. Even now, risen from the dead and exalted to the right hand of God the Father Almighty, the author of Hebrews tells us “he lives to intercede for us.” (Hebrews 7:25)
- Jesus practiced offering what was most precious in his life to God. Jesus offered his own life as a sacrifice of atonement for the sin of this world. Jesus offered his own life as a sacrifice of atonement for all that is broken in this world. He offered the gift of his own life as an offering of love. “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” As Paul would write in Romans 5, “God proves his love for us in this, while we were still sinners Christ died for us.” I try to remember that every time I find myself short of breath reading Genesis 22 about Abraham and Isaac and Mount Moriah. One day there would be another mountain, with another Father, and another Son, and when it was all said and done God will have provided a sacred and holy gift that brings life out of death. Why? Because God was not willing that anyone should perish. Why? Because God loves this world so much he has given his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life.
- Does Jesus practice laughter? He certainly brings laughter and joy and blessing. It is hard to imagine things like walking on the water and feeding 5,000 and the lame and blind and the leper being made well and those incredible and unbelievable blessings not being accompanied with laughter. Jesus said he came to bring life and to bring it abundantly. He came to meet our deepest need. He said in Luke, “Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.” (Luke 6:22)

I wonder if there wasn't laughter on that morning when the devil came to spy on the grave where Jesus had been buried. That was going to be the devil's finest hour. Jesus had been whipped and stripped and hung on a cross to die, wrapped in cloth and put in the grave. Don't you think the devil was there with all his minions as

the women arrived, as Peter and John drew near to the grave? He wanted to see the tears flow as the followers of Jesus gathered around the dead and lifeless body of their beloved Lord. He wanted to hear the mourning and cries of sorrow. He pushed his way to the front and hushed his evil charges, wanting to see every sign of despair and hear every sob and wail. But the laugh was on him. The laugh was on the devil. That's why we celebrate Easter. He has turned our mourning into laughter! He is risen. He is not dead. He is alive. And the devil's dancing is turned into defeat and embarrassment.

- Ultimately, what Jesus has done for us is what gives us our faith. We trust in Jesus as the one whose death and resurrection have defeated the powers of sin and evil and we trust that even now, even in these days when we can only see in a mirror dimly, even in these days when what is broke in this world breaks our heart and fills us with sadness, even in these days we trust that Jesus is at work, bringing healing and wholeness and repairing, restoring, and rescuing this world that is broke. Abraham practiced faith. He believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. And now we can have faith, a deep and lasting and abiding faith. As Paul wrote in Romans 1:16, 17: "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jews, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'"

Jesus did not come as a bolt out of the blue. He is Jesus Christ. He is Jesus the Messiah. He is the fulfillment of the creator's rescue plan. And the creator's rescue plan was to call Abraham and his family. We are part of God's rescue plan. We are followers of Jesus. We have been called to practice our faith in the world. What a challenge and what an opportunity for us to be lights that shine for our Lord Jesus Christ, as we practice hospitality, as we practice intercession, as we practice offering what is most precious in our lives to our living God, as we practice laughter, and in and through it all, as we practice our faith.