

“Overflowing with Blessing”

Genesis 12:1-4

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A man wrote a thank you note to his mom. He wrote it late in his life. In fact, he wrote his mother the thank you note thirty years *after* she died. I understand that. It can take a long time to appreciate fully and to thank properly the folks who have played such a significant role in our lives.

Well, thirty years after his mother died, this man wrote his mother a thank you note. In the note he remembered a day from sixty years before, when he was just a child. In that thank you note to his mother, a note he wrote to her even though she had been deceased thirty years, he told her how he vividly remembered the day when his dad brought home a watermelon. They took the watermelon, put it in the river, and let the cold waters chill the melon through and through. Then they cracked it open and ate it all. He wrote, "How simple and memorable a good day can be when expectations are low."

I am absolutely certain God had more than a watermelon in mind when he promised to bless Abram on that day so many years ago.

- God said he would bless Abram and make him into a great nation.
- God said he would make Abram's name great, and that Abram himself would be a blessing.
- God said he would bless Abram, and ultimately, through Abram all peoples on earth would be blessed.

Oh yes, I am absolutely certain God had more than a watermelon in mind when he promised to bless Abram on that day so many years ago. But there is something about a man writing a thank you note to his mom, a mom who has been dead thirty years, about a wonderful watermelon that was enjoyed on a hot summer day more than sixty years before, something about that seems to me to fit perfectly with a sermon

about blessing. If we can enter into a world where something as simple as a watermelon can be enjoyed as a blessing, a blessing that makes an impact that endures more than half a century, then it seems to me we have entered a world where we can truly appreciate what it means to live into the fullness of a life that is blessed by God. In other words, we can enter into a world that is overflowing with blessing.

To enter into and to enjoy the fullness of a world overflowing with God's blessing, we might need to become like children. Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." He also said, "Let the little children come to me, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." Something like a watermelon might well appear too small to us mature adults to give much thought about when we think of blessings. But if we can come to Jesus as little children, we might find ourselves writing a thank you note to a loved one who has long been gone from this world and remembering a day in the distant past when something as small, as ordinary, as common as a watermelon was large and extraordinary and more memorable than we could ever put into words.

It was Charles Dickens who reminded me of the call of Jesus to become like children. In a chapter with the title, "I Observe", David Copperfield makes the comment, "I believe the power of observation in numbers of very young children to be quite wonderful for its closeness and accuracy. Indeed, I think that most grown ups who are remarkable in this respect, may with greater propriety be said not to have lost the faculty, than to have acquired it; the rather, as I generally observe such people to retain a certain freshness, and gentleness, and capacity of being pleased, which are also an inheritance they have preserved from their childhood."¹

That man who wrote a thank you note about a watermelon from some sixty years before, he was in the words of David Copperfield,

¹ Charles Dickens, David Copperfield, p. 24.

“pleased with an inheritance that was preserved from childhood.” That man treasured that memory, that inheritance, clinging tightly to it as a blessing that continued to bring joy and happiness and warm feelings of love to his life. That man wrote a thank you note to his mother, a mother who had been dead 30 years. I wonder what it would be like if we all worked together on a thank you note to God, a thank you note to the God who appeared to Abram more than 4,000 years ago and promised to bless him. We have an example before us, a man who wrote a thank you note for a blessing that was simple, and yes, very sweet. A man wrote a thank you note about the blessing of a watermelon.

But when the man wrote the thank you note, he was writing it with the heart of a child.

There is a child here today who would write God a thank you note for a tree that grew on the side of a hill. The roots of the tree had been washed away, leaving room for that little child to hide among those roots in a most unique tree house. There among those roots, lost to the world, his imagination ran wild. That same child would write God a thank you note for a small stream that came to a large rock, dropped over that rock, and opened up into a pool of fresh water. The water falling into that pool splashed and made a little blanket of bubbles. That child would write a thank you note to God for such a peaceful place of safety and sanctuary, that little place called “Bubble Pool.”

There is a child here who remembers the Christmas when his big brother came home from college. No one had ever before grown up and left the family home, and the leaving of his big brother left a big hole in the family. When his dad said the brother was coming home that night, a vigil was launched immediately. Watching the road, listening for each sound of a car, anxiously awaiting, even now he can feel his heart race when the roar of a 1963 Ford Comet Station Wagon was heard in the driveway and the big brother had returned home. The return did not last long for soon the whole family was piled in that 1963 Ford Comet

Station Wagon and they toured the streets of their small town singing Christmas Carols. That night there surely was Joy to the World.

The back of that little child remembers the feeling of his mother gently rubbing his shoulders, laying him down to sleep, singing a sweet song about lullaby and goodnight, asking that God would help the child sleep in heavenly peace. He remembers a day when he was separated from his father. His father led a day camp for hundreds of kids, and somehow the little one lost his way. He was surrounded by people, but he was not with his father. He started to cry. He panicked. He searched to no avail. Just when all seemed lost, he caught sight of his father. Running full speed, spending every ounce of energy, he fell into his father's arms. That embrace, now more than half a century ago, that embrace is one he will always treasure. That embrace he hopes to experience again one day when God makes all things new.

That child would write a thank you note to God for those blessings and so many more. I wonder if there is another child here today who would write their thank you note? I wonder if each one of us doesn't have our own memories of blessings. Watermelons and station wagons, tree forts and bubbling pools of pleasure, the touch of a mother, the embrace of a father.

If the child in you can express thanks to God for those simple and sweet blessings, my guess is the child within you will be even more ready to say thank you for other blessings that come from God. You might even open a book like this bible and say thank you to God in the words of the psalmist.

Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits...

All his benefits? Can we even begin to remember all his benefits? What an exercise in worship and devotion to try to remember all the benefits,

all the blessings our God has given. If we can thank God for the blessing of a watermelon and waterfall, a rushing stream and a peaceful lake, a singing bird and a croaking toad, then the child within us can embark on the exciting exercise of remembering all his benefits...

Who forgives all our sins and heals all our diseases...who redeems our life from the pit and crowns us with love and compassion...who satisfies our desires with good things and renews our youth like an eagle...the benefits are bountiful, God who is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love.

Surely our thank you note would include the ladder that blessed the life of Jacob, the dreams that guided the life of Joseph, the burning bush that revealed the glory of God to Moses, the blood on the doorpost and the unleavened bread of the Passover, the parted waters of the Red Sea and the bread that came down from heaven every single day.

And how the child of faith would write with the greatest care words of thanks for the manger, for the seas that were calmed, the loaves that were multiplied, the bodies that were healed, the wounded hearts that were made whole, the outsiders who found refuge, for the hard wood of the cross that lifted up God's Beloved Son, for the rock that rolled away leaving only an empty tomb...and for the hands that were wounded, the side that was pierced, and Jesus inviting us to touch his wounds and his scars and to know they are all marks of God's love. Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.

On that day long ago, God promised that he would bless Abram. Can you imagine if Abram was there when God received our thank you notes, notes about watermelons and waterfalls, Jacob's Ladders and Joseph's dreams, Passover Lambs and the Lamb of God. The story of God blessing Abram is an invitation to each one of us, to every one of us, indeed, to all of us who are children of God, to shower God with thanks for all the blessings we have received.

If in our childlike faith we can thank God for a watermelon, I guess it would be okay if in our childlike faith we gave thanks to God for baseball. A lot of baseball has been played this summer in the major leagues, so I won't hold it against you if you don't remember the score of the game between the Chicago White Sox and the New York Yankees back on August 12. It was a very exciting game. The White Sox won 9-8 on a walk-off home run by Tim Anderson. Besides being a thrilling one run victory, there was something else of note about this game. Maybe this description of that game-winning home run will help you figure out the significance. In the words of one sportswriter, the ball went "cornward." Cornward? Yes, the home run disappeared into a corn field. You see, even though this game was between a team from Chicago and a team from New York, the game was played in a dreamlike setting on a diamond in Dyersville, Iowa. Enough with the hints. The game was played on the Field of Dreams, just like the field from the movie in 1989, where heroes of old came out of the cornfield to play some catch and hit some balls.

Out in the cornfields of Iowa a man started hearing voices and seeing visions. "If you build it, he will come." "Ease his pain." "Go the distance." In a humorous and touching series of events, long dead baseball players come to life and start having pick-up games on a baseball diamond that has been converted from a cornfield. Shoeless Joe Jackson is given the chance to redeem himself on this field of dreams; a reclusive writer comes out of his shell and lives again, and a kid who never had his shot at playing with the best gets to give it a go. For all of these people the loose ends in life get tied together. In their own way, they each have a personal experience of blessing.

But the corn farmer can't figure out his role. The farmer watches all the other characters in the movie find their blessing, but he is left without his blessing. He has plowed under valuable corn to build a baseball park. He has traveled to Boston, then to Minnesota, following the mysterious voices. Others have found their blessing. Finally, he asks, "What's in it for me?" It turns out that one of the great regrets in his life

is that his father loved baseball, but baseball had ripped them apart. The boy had given up baseball in an adolescent rebellion aimed at hurting his dad. And then his dad died. His dad died and the son never had the chance to be reconciled. That son, the farmer who plowed his cornfield and went on an epic journey, that farmer, that son asks, “What’s in it for me?” In a beautiful scene of reconciliation...,in a scene that is not only about reconciliation, but a scene that is about blessing in all of its fullness and wonder...in a beautiful scene about blessing, the movie closes as the farmer sees one of the mysterious ballplayers taking off his catcher’s gear. He realizes it is his dad, but it is his dad as a young man. The farmer is amazed and full of wonder. Carefully and quietly, as if it is too good to be true, he introduces the young catcher...he introduce his dad to his wife and daughter, although it seems the dad does not realize this is his son and family. As the dad turns to leave and return to the cornfield, the son sees an opportunity to bring healing. He calls out in a hesitant yet hopeful voice, “Hey dad, do you want to have a catch?” The dad turns and says, “Yeah son, I’d like to.” And as the two of them play catch, father and son, at long last reconciled, you fully understand why they call it the field of dreams. That tender scene of blessing left many of us with childlike hearts weeping as we left the theater.

Watching that scene numerous times since the movie was released in 1989, the power of a father and a son, a parent and a child, being united, the powerful impact always remains. Thinking of how meaningful it is when a parent and a child connect, I return to that man named Abram. I wonder if a child, a childlike faith, could look at that man named Abram as he was called by God to go out, to leave, to journey into the unknown, I wonder if a faith that is childlike could look at that situation and understand what is so hard for so many to understand. On that day when God called Abram, Abram didn’t have anything. Abram had no watermelon. He had no waterfall. He had no cornfield, no crops, no livestock, no land, and no home. While we might be tempted to say how terrible it is that Abram had nothing, the faith that is childlike looks at Abram with an ability to see what only a childlike faith can see. Abram had nothing...except God. A faith that is childlike,

a faith that trusts, a faith that believes, that kind of childlike faith understands that when you have God, you have everything. Someone once said, “You never know how much you need God, until God is all you have.”

Abram was in a unique situation. God was all Abram had. And that was enough. That was more than enough. That was all Abram needed.

Abram believed in God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.

Abram believed in God and Abram was truly blessed with what is absolutely and always the best. Abram was blessed with a relationship with God, the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of all life. Abram was blessed with a relationship with God his Father in heaven. And that was all Abram needed.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.