

## **“Are you a blessing?” Gen 12:1-4**

**“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. 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. 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.” So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him.”**

Have you noticed that there are these teaching in the Bible which we know quite well, but we still manage to forget about them, and comfortably ignore them. Our today's reading from Genesis 12 brings to us one of such teachings.

The call of Abraham. Almost every Christian would have read or at least heard about what happened with Abraham. And still we tend to forget about what our God teaches us through this event.

So, what happened to Abraham? God Yahweh spoke to him as said: “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.” Nice story, right? Would you like to swap with Abraham?

Let's see what Yahweh asked from him. Leave your country, you community and your relatives and go where I'll tell you to go. Isn't this a lovely invitation? We live in our country and that's our environment, we know how to live here.

We live in our community, and our community provides for us, there is everything we need for our lives. We live in our families, and they are our closest support network, we can rely on them knowing that if anything happens they will be here for us.

Sure, we all have our problems, but living in our country, community and family we can manage quite well, we can feel that we are ... in control, right? We know where to look for help, how to solve our problems, etc.

Then suddenly: “Leave everything!” See how radical was this request. Leave everything that you are used to rely on, and now – trust me, that I will provide for you everything that you may need.

Sounds crazy, right? Who would agree to do something like that? That's madness. Why would Abraham do it? May be that was the price for his salvation? What do you think? Of course, not.

We read today in Paul's letter to Romans, and we can read it throughout the Bible, – the Triune God doesn't expect us to earn His forgiveness and our salvation. He offers and gives it to you as a gift. No conditions attached.

Then why on earth would someone agree to such deal? One word, – blessing. ‘Abraham, do what I say and I will bless you and you will be a blessing for many.’ This was the offer; I'll bless you and you will be a blessing for many.

OK, we may think. Now it begins to make sense. Who doesn't want God's blessings! But how do people often understand God's blessings? What are these blessing that we usually have in mind? Good life. Wealthy life. Healthy life. Peaceful and prosperous life.

Sure, these all can be called God's blessings. But is this what Yahweh had in mind when He called Abraham and promised to bless him? Look at the life of Abraham!

Sure, he had some good things going as well, but he also often was in danger, in far lands, among strangers, in war, in ongoing arguments with his wives, in challenges and tribulations, and so on.

What did Yahweh had in mind when He said 'I will bless you'? Can you come up with the answer? He was talking about the greatest blessing that any human being can have, and it is – God's own presence with us.

'Abraham, leave everything, trust me, and you will experience my presence as never before, and you will learn that if I am with you, you don't need anything else. And then, you will be a blessing for others.'

How was Abraham a blessing for others? Did he make others prosperous and gave them peaceful life? Not exactly. But wherever he went, he worshiped God Yahweh and he witnessed about this gracious and merciful God.

The blessing that Abraham brought to all people was infinitely grater than simply prosperous life. He brought them the Good News about loving God, he brought them God's presence and ultimately... forgiveness and eternal life.

These are the greatest blessings that any human being can hope to receive – God's presence, forgiveness and eternal life. And these are the greatest blessings that we could ever hope to give to others.

Do you think that this event has any significance for us as Christians, or is it just an event recorded for our information? I asked you already earlier, – would you like to swap with Abraham?

Don't you worry about your answer. For in fact, this is not for us to decide. When Jesus gave you His Holy Spirit, when He made you a child of our Father in Heaven, when He made you His disciple, He commanded you – follow me!

On the one hand, it is true, Jesus doesn't ask all of us to leave our countries, and our communities, and our families and to go who-knows-where. But on the other hand, His call to you to leave what you have and to follow Him is as real and as serious as His call to Abraham.

What exactly then it means of us, here, in Barossa, living 4000 years later, on the others side of the world? Let's see what God the Father and Jesus expect from us. Essentially the same thing as from Abraham.

You know that you are saved, right? Are you sure? When you will stand before Christ on the last day, do you know what He will say to you? “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” (Mat 25:34)

And how can you be sure? Have you been good enough? Of course, not! Because you are baptized. Because in your baptism you were united with Jesus. He promised to forgive you all your sins and to have with Him in His Kingdom.

And even if we fail in our Christian promises, He is faithful and powerful and will never fail you or withdraw His promises. This is most certainly true. It means that what Jesus expects from you is not about your salvation.

God’s forgiveness and eternal life are yours already, as they were Abraham’s already before he was called by Yahweh. Then what is this about? About leaving our comfort zones, about being blessed and about being a blessing.

What does this mean practically? I’ll try to explain. First, about leaving our comfort zones. This week I had a conversation with a pastor who has lived in different continents and experienced how wonderfully the Church grows.

Reflecting on the Lutheran church in Australia he said that it often seems that we are still living in past, and are still focused on our past. That for most people their future hopes for our church are – to be again like we were 30 years ago.

We long for past, and not for future. We may laugh about it, but many of you would know sad stories, where for some their place in pews was more important than Jesus and salvation.

For others, some elements of interior or a certain music seems to be more important than forgiveness and eternal life. As that pastor had observed, for too many the Church is mostly about me, about what I like, what I prefer.

It sounds almost like ‘I don’t care if others go to hell, as long, as I don’t need to change or do anything’. This is how attached we can become to what we think makes us feel comfortable.

This is a very sad reality. Do you know why is this so sad? Because such people are, on the one hand, very close to Jesus, but, on the other hand, light years away. It seems that they had never experience true joy of the Holy Spirit.

When it sinks in, when penny drops and you finally understand that – I am a condemned sinner, who deserves God’s wrath and punishment, but Jesus Christ has taken my place. He received what I deserve.

He gives me, a beggar, His forgiveness and life. He desired to have me, unworthy, with Him in eternity. This joy transforms us. We want to talk about Jesus. After the Service we don’t talk about the weather, but about what Jesus has done for us. We want to tell others about this Jesus. This joy overflows. The Holy Spirit overflows in us.

I wish I could preach in a way that you all could experience this joy. Because when you do, nothing else matters. Jesus calls you and you respond: “Here I am Lord!” I wish and pray that our gracious Lord would bless you with this joy.

I have asked in different settings about how many non-Christian friends people have? And sometimes there is surprise in people’s eyes – what is this, non-Christian friends? How many of your friends are not Christians?

Sure, it is lovely to spend time in friendly Christian fellowship. But if this was all that we are to do, then Yahweh would have said to Abraham: “Just stick around your people and everything will be fine.”

Or Jesus would have said to His disciples: “Guys, just don’t wander too far. Stay close and enjoy one another’s company.” But instead He said: “Go and make disciples of all nations!” What are we ready to do for Jesus?

You see, your salvation doesn’t depend on how many times you have witnessed about Jesus or how many people you have led to Jesus. Your place in paradise is safe because of what Jesus has done for you. It won’t change.

But you may miss out on something. Yahweh said: “I will bless you.” Remember? “I will bless you with my presence. You will experience me closer than ever. As you go where I send you, I will be with you.”

It simply means that you may miss out on one of the greatest joys. That is on the joy which we experience when we try to share the Gospel with others. When we tell about Jesus, it is like being together with Jesus.

Speaking His words to others, introducing others to Jesus. “See, here He is, your loving Savior, He is waiting for you, come and I’ll introduce you to Him.”

Many of you would have experienced this joy. When you pray for someone, when you prepare yourself to tell them about Jesus, when you discuss with your brothers and sisters how to do it better.

When you finally have God given opportunity to speak to them the words of eternal life... how would you describe your feelings? Joy, divine joy, the presence of the Holy Spirit, the foretaste of the Paradise to come.

And we can experience it already now. This is what it means – I will bless you. But remember, there was one more thing. You will be a blessing. We already spoke about it; what is the greatest gift we could possibly give to someone else?

That’s right, forgiveness and eternal life. Do you like to give people gifts? Sure, we all do. It makes our hearts sing. But what about the greatest gift of all? The forgiveness of all sins and eternal life in God’s presence.

And, sure, often people don’t want this gift. They may reject us, or we may not know how to give this gift. And we may worry and then hold back. The liberating truth is that we can’t make anyone a Christian.

Even we all together can't. Only the Holy Spirit can. We are only His messengers. What will happen with those who hear our message, it is not up to us, it's up to the Holy Spirit. As for us, we are to enjoy God's blessings, His presence, and to be a blessing for others.

One sermon probably won't change how you live. But I want you to think about these issues seriously. The future of the Church is glorious. For this is not ours, it is God's Church. And there will be lots of joy as many will come to Jesus.

For us the question is, do we want to be blessed by God? Do we want to experience the joy of His presence? Do we want to be a blessing for many? Are we ready to follow Jesus as Abraham did?

I pray that we all could say as Joshua once said: "But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." (Jos 24:15) And the peace of God which surpasses our understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Jesus Christ. Amen.