

ABRAHAM #2 Genesis 12:2-3 10-4-15

THE GREAT "I WILLS"

(Genesis 12) Last week we began our look together at Genesis 12-24, the life and times of Abraham the man of faith from Y2A, 2000 years before Christ. We pondered the contact by God, the call of God, the challenge from God, all of which came from chapter 12:1. Today we are going to double our pace and cover two verses which form the second half of God's initial communication with Abraham. We shall read verses. **1-3** *Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; 2 And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; 3 And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."*

Last time we pondered the difficulty of the call God laid on Abraham, to leave the security of country and family and father to go to a strange land. We asked how Abraham could do it and the general answer is *faith*, but you have to have something to put your faith in. Today we read what it was. It was the promise of God. It is the promise of future grace described in verses 2 and 3 that enabled Abraham to obey the call of God in verse 1. Ben Patterson accurately states this about the ways and words of God. He says *the "you musts" we hear from God are overshadowed by his "I wills."* Got that? ® That's really true, but some people, maybe you, only seem to be able to hear the "you musts" of God. Oh you are really aware of what God expects you to do but you haven't come to grips with his many precious promises. Do you know what kind of spiritual life that can lead to? Very often a joyless legalism, if you are able to maintain a religious life at all. It tends to be all duty with no source of energy for obedience. That energy is supplied to us by an understanding and embracing of the *I wills*. Now, it must be said that some of us seem only able to hear the *I wills* of God while ignoring His commands. That can lead to careless carnality. Which of those do you want? Joyless legalism or careless carnality? How about instead a joyful, full-hearted devotion? That can only happen when we listen to all that God says - the *you musts* and the *I wills*. It is the latter that we focus on today because verses 2 and 3 are full of wonderful promises from God. All totaled there are seven promises. See them? #1 is I will make you a great nation. #2 - I will bless you. #3 I'll make your name great. #4 You shall be a blessing. #5 I will bless those who bless you. #6 I will curse those who curse you. #7 In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. That's the seven,

but to simplify things for us I have boiled these seven down to three and will offer a look at the three great promises to Abe.

The first of those promises is what I will call *greatness*. ® The word “great” is used twice in the promise. 2a *I will make you a great nation.* 2c *And make your name great.* Great nation. Great name. They are related. Abraham’s name became great as his nation became great. Now to appreciate this promise you want to notice to whom God was talking here. This is Abram of Ur, who has how many children? Zero. Abram would really love just a family, one child would be nice, but this puzzling God is talking about a nation. Furthermore, he was being asked to leave his family and go to an entirely new place where he had no relatives, no reputation, no name and no influence. This *great nation* business seems highly unlikely, but it happened. Oh, it took a while. It took quite a while for this to see any fulfillment. It started with just Isaac, and then there was Jacob, but Jacob had twelve fruitful boys who, by the time they left Egypt 400 years later, had become quite a great people, so that when the great people finally connected to a great homeland you had a great nation. But the greatness of Israel that would come under the kings David and Solomon was just a preview of the fulfillment to come. The final expression of God’s promise has come to pass in the church of Jesus. You see, when we study the promises of God to Abraham we aren’t just reading some distant word to an ancient figure. These promises are being kept in our very own day and in our very own lives. North Park Church of Wexford is a city in Abraham’s great nation. And every man or woman of faith today is a citizen of that nation.

Look at Galatians 3 to see what I’m talking about. Galatians 3:6-7 (NIV) *So also Abraham “believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” 7 Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham.* Father Abraham had many sons; many sons had father Abraham; and I am one of them, and so are you. What is that supposed to mean? I’m not a Jew, and you likely aren’t either. How can we be called *children of Abraham*? Paul argues that the true sons and daughters of Abraham are not the racial Jews but the heart Jews, those who like Papa A put their trust in the Lord. Galatians 3:7-9 (NAS) *Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. 8 The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “All the nations will be blessed in you.” 9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.* That means you and me and all who love Jesus whether Jew or Gentile. We share in the promises

made to Abraham. So again Paul writes in Galatians 3:**28-29** *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.* Who inherits the promises to Abraham? Believers in Jesus. Romans 9 also takes our attention away from biological succession to spiritual succession. Romans 9:**6b** (ESV) *Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel.* What's that mean? It means that not all of physical Israel is a part of spiritual Israel. Romans 9:**7-8** (ESV) *and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." 8 This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.* Once again Paul is arguing that the issue is not genetics, at least not the kind you can study with a microscope. I suppose if there were a DNA of the soul you could see in that our link to father Abraham. His believing heart is present in every true Christian.

What that means for us today is simply and powerfully this - these promises are not just his, they are ours. We are the great nation God promised. Look at what is said to the church in I Peter 2:**9** *you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.* I was reading this week that of the seven billion humans on our planet, more than two billion call themselves *Christian*. That is a great nation. Wow! Did God ever come thru on this one! He has given to Abraham a great nation and a great name, and you and I are part of that living legacy.

Before we go on I want to make just a general observation about the comparisons between how Genesis 11 begins and how Genesis 12 begins. Look at Genesis 11 which contains the tower of Babel story. The tone of this chapter is very different from that of chapter 12. The beginning of 11 is an open door into the mind of the secular city. It shows men functioning without God, setting about to make a name for themselves, to create their own great nation. It is about their plans and their doings. By contrast Genesis 12 tells about God's plans and God's doings. The verbal contrasts are impressive. In Genesis 11:3 it states, "They said to each other." In Genesis 12 it says "The Lord said." In Genesis 11 we find the builders of Babel saying, "Let us make bricks, Let us build a city for ourselves, so that we can make a name for ourselves." In Genesis 12 we find God telling Abraham, "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless

you, I will make your name great.” Can you name any of the architects of Babel? Not a one. But everybody knows about Abraham. That is the difference between do-it -yourself greatness and the greatness which God bestows on His servants.

On now to the second thing God promises in our text. And this one is hard to give a name to. God says in verse 3ab *I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse.* That is really one thought isn't it? And it is a promise of reciprocation. It means a return in kind or in like value. God basically tells Abraham that He will treat folks just like they treat him. Now listen, if you knew that about somebody, if you knew that God would bless or curse you by how you treated that individual what would you do? You'd go out of your way wouldn't you, to be extra nice. When I was in high-school I worked in a factory which was owned and managed by my best friend's dad. And I can assure you, nobody there was hard on my buddy Chris. The boss man's boy got real good treatment because folks figured it was in their best interest to be liked by the favored son of the man in power. So, if you get what God is saying here you learn an important lesson. You can win blessing or cursing by how you treat Abraham. Ahh, but that's no good, Abraham isn't around anymore. Oh really? Remember what we said a minute ago. Believers in Christ are the heirs of Abraham and the promises to Abraham were to himself and his children. When we come to the New Testament we find God saying things about Christians that he says here about Abraham. Look at Matthew 25:31-40 *when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. 32 All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; 33 and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. 34 "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; 36 naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' 37 Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? 38 And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? 39 When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' 40 The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.'* What is Jesus teaching there? He is teaching

us that He identifies with his people, called here his *brothers*. Jesus elsewhere identifies his brothers as being those who do the Father's will, and those who bless his brothers get blessed by him. He reciprocates. Likewise, if you read further in this passage, what does the King do to those who neglected his followers? He curses them eternally. What we learn here is that if you are a disciple of Jesus the promise to Abe applies to you. Those who bless you are blessed by God. Those who curse you are cursed by God. You are very, very special.

Now, it would be great if everyone understood this wouldn't it? If you lived under a banner that followed you everywhere and said, "Child of God, handle with care and honor." But, as you read the Bible you see it doesn't happen that way. Abraham wasn't always treated well. Certainly his descendants were not. Even today the physical descendants of Abraham are hated by much of the world and certainly Christians have not been the objects of kind treatment in the world and by the world either. This promise does not guarantee us special favor on earth, but it does support us emotionally because it tells us that God will see to it that our supporters are blessed and our enemies cursed. This means two things practically. It means that if I am the recipient of your graciousness there need be no obligation on my part to personally reward you for that. I know God will. I know He will. In Luke 10 Jesus is sending out his disciples on their missionary journey and he instructs them to stay in whatever homes will open to them along the way. Luke 10:5 *Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house.'* That is, pronounce a blessing on those who do you good. 7 *Stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not keep moving from house to house.* You know what the Lord is saying there? Be willing to accept the generosity and grace of my people. Don't think that you are being a burden. You know, so many of us think like that. We just refuse to put any one out. Or, we figure that if someone does something special for us we have to do something special for them. Well, when you go off to seminary and become a pastor you typically have to get over this sort of thing. Listen, I have been sponsored by the church for over thirty years. Many of you sacrifice for me and my family. Something within me is bothered by that and says, "OK, Hendley, you have to pay these folks back now." You know. That isn't the spirit of God. That is my pride saying that because receiving grace is humbling. ® One Sunday night as I was coming home I came across a man whose car had stalled, so I got my jumper cables and came back and helped him get going. This fellow was so grateful and offered to work around my house. Something within him insisted that he repay my kindness. I

said to him, “Alex, God has blessed me in big ways, let me bless you in this little way. I don’t need any favors back.” Receiving grace is humbling isn’t it? But it helps me to know this - that kindness directed toward me is not going to go unrewarded. Not at all. God promises blessing. The reciprocation is not our concern. God says he will see to that.

But there is another side to this isn’t there. There is the cursing side. Read Luke 10:**10-12**
But whatever city you enter and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, 11 ‘Even the dust of your city which clings to our feet we wipe off in protest against you; yet be sure of this, that the kingdom of God has come near.’ 12 I say to you, it will be more tolerable in that day for Sodom than for that city. Woah! The same principle of reciprocity is at work here. And the application for me in this instance is to pity rather than hate those who do me wrong. That may not be easy but the principle of divine reciprocity should come to our aid. We know God will repay, God will judge. So instead of growing to hate the haters and hurt the hurters, we can follow Jesus into having compassion on those who bring us pain. We know they will regret it. And who knows but that God may use our compassion to open their hearts to His love and grace.

Shall we move along to our third and final point for today? This is the third element of God’s promise and that is influence. ® This is found in both verse 2 and verse 3. In verse 2 *I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great. And so you shall be a blessing.* For the most part Abraham is described here as the blessee, but now it says to he is the blesser. In short he is blessed to be a blessing. And the opportunity to be a blesser is part of the blessing isn’t it? Do you see that? Zechariah 8:**13** *It will come about that just as you were a curse among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so I will save you that you may become a blessing.* Follow what God is saying there. I will save you for what? To be a blessing. It is true for us as it was for Abraham that we are saved to serve. God didn’t just choose Abe and the Jews for them to horde all the goodness of God. They were to be an instrument of holiness, peace and joy to the whole world. The same is true for us. We are to be conduits of mercy not cul-de-sacs. Maximum growth occurs when we are taking in much and putting out much. When I was in Israel I got to see and float in the Dead Sea. It is a very warm body of water, extremely salty, totally calm and totally dead. No life in it at all. The reason it is dead is because its water goes nowhere. The Jordan River flows into the Dead Sea but the waters of the sea go nowhere. That, my friend, is a formula for death - to be a consumer without

being a giver. Too many in our churches are spiritual consumers, taking what Jesus and the church have to give without any outlets of service and ministry. Some of you may fall in that category. And I must inform you that's not right, it's not healthy and it misses the blessing.

I read this week of about the owner of a drive-thru coffee business in Portland who was surprised one morning to have a customer not only pay for her mocha but pay for the drink of the person in the car behind her. It put a smile on the owner's face to tell the next customer her drink had already been paid for. The second customer was so pleased that someone else had purchased her coffee that she bought coffee for the next customer. This string of kindnesses - one stranger to the next - lasted for over two hours. Now that's how it's supposed to work with God's love right? You want to sing, its fresh like spring you want to pass it on! And what a privilege it is to do so! We are to be a blessing, but like the coffee story, our blessing others flows out of having been blessed ourselves. We are blesser and blessee but which comes first? Being the blessee. God fills our cups, and then we, out of His fullness can pour into others. And the funny thing is that doing so is the only way to really maintain God's fullness in our lives. Love is that strange thing that you can only keep if you give it away.

Bob Sjogren in his book on world missions writes about God's covenant with Abraham and describes what he calls the top line of the Covenant and the bottom line. The top line is that list of what God pours into His chosen people. The bottom line is what they are expected to pour out into others, even into foreign nations. He writes, *If I'm focusing on the top line of the covenant only and saying, "God bless me, bless me, bless me." I've missed half of Christianity. The other half is turning around with that blessing and reaching out.* I think of the words of Jesus about how if you have been given much, much will be expected of you. That's true. With privilege goes responsibility. Same in the kingdom of God. We are saved, but not to sit around and wait for the rapture. We are saved to serve. Psalm 67 is interesting. Psalm 67:**1** *God be gracious to us and bless us, And cause His face to shine upon us.* Great! That's a fine prayer. We need that. That is the top line of the covenant. But it doesn't stop there. **2** *That Your way may be known on the earth, Your salvation among all nations.* The blessing of God is hopefully to spill over And here especially it is talking about spilling over into the nations of the world. The covenant God made with Abraham started with one guy but had an international goal. **3** *Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You.* Then look at the last verse of the psalm **7** *God blesses us, That all the ends of the earth may fear Him.* What is

God's goal in blessing His people? Not just your own personal well-being but that we might declare him to all peoples. Some of you have noticed the new pictures and frames of our missionaries in the downstairs hallway. We want to raise their profile and the call to bless the nations. Look around you at the banners hanging in this sanctuary. Banners of the countries where we have missionaries. North Park is a church invested in world mission and that fits the paradigm laid out here. We are to be blessing the nations with the knowledge of salvation. And I am glad to be in a church that is doing that. The ancient Jewish nation didn't always do so well with this did they? When Jesus came they had lost this entirely and were ingrown, seeing the nations around them not as a mission field but only as a threat. So, a major part of the message Christ preached involved the purpose of God that was transcultural - salvation for Samaritans and Romans and Gentiles of all sorts. He told His followers to go and be witnesses to all the nations, but first they were supposed to do what? Huh? Wait for the blessing. The Holy Spirit, the promise of the Father will come, you will be the blessed and then you will go and be blessings to all the nations.

Look again at Genesis 12:3c *in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.* We read the same thing stated by God to Abraham in Genesis 22:18a *In your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.* This part of the promise is real easy to explain because the New Testament does it for us. Galatians 3:8 *The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "All the nations will be blessed in you."* Abraham never left the Middle East. How could he bless all nations? Thru his offspring, his seed, his descendant - Jesus, the savior of the world. Christ is how all nations are blessed in Abraham. But this Christ makes his blessings flow thru His people who are scattered everywhere and now go by the title, "Christian." Is that a title you wear? Is that a name you want to claim? Then hey, you are one very blessed person, who has the privilege and the calling to reach out to the world. Your concern, Christian, must be to claim the promise that is yours and with it the challenge of blessing others, even men and women of all nations. Take a moment to ask God what that means for you and then listen for His answer.