

Sermon Text for August 9, 2015

by
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Acts 15:36-41, Genesis 13:2-12

“When God’s blessings overflow”

It is great to be back with all of you. We had a wonderful vacation. This was my view on my morning runs, and it really was a vacation. One of the reasons it was a vacation was that while we were there my computer died. So, I had backed it up 6 months ago which means that we have to redo everything that we have done in the church from February to now. That means VBS is going to happen again next week. Not really, it is great to be back though.

Welcome back to Genesis as well. The last time we were in Genesis, two weeks ago, we read about Abraham who was asked by God to step out of his comfort zone so that he could receive God’s blessing, and, if you remember, so that those around him could receive those blessings as well. Abraham did and we see today in our Scripture how God definitely comes through and blesses him abundantly, many times over because he followed God’s simple command of Go.

Today we are going to look at God’s blessings in our lives, in the life of the church, in the life of this nation, and how these blessings can have an affect of us forgetting God’s promises to each and every one of us. It is not by chance that statistically church attendance is down in times of plenty, but times of crisis church attendance skyrockets. 9-11 proved that in my ministry. The temptation is to forget God’s blessings when they overflow for us, let’s see how we can avoid that pitfall.

READ

When I’m on vacation I tend to read and I have a hard time tearing myself from books when I read. I read *The Stand* which is about Custer’s last stand and it continues to baffle me how history repeats itself. Here we were a nation that had so much, and yet we felt as if we needed even more.

We tend to be people who hold fairly closely onto the resources that we have and we are willing to share if we have enough to keep us comfortable. But when there is competition over those resources, well, all the rules get thrown out the window. That includes any guidelines we might get from our Savior Jesus Christ who commands that we go without so that others can have. Wars have been started because of a scarcity of resources that require nations to look elsewhere for supplies. The region of Palestine and Israel has always been up in arms historically because of the scarcity of water. World War II many say was a result of the need for continued expansion and need for resources that countries couldn't find in their homeland.

Abraham and Lot find themselves in a situation that was very similar to a pre-war condition. They were both very wealthy and had an overabundance of flocks and livestock. They were rich, but there was a very scarce commodity, Who knows what it was? There was only so much land. They didn't own that much land because they were in occupied territory. We read that the Canaanites and the Perizzites were also living in that land, verse 7. Their shepherds began to feud amongst themselves because they couldn't find the space to put their sheep out to pasture. Abraham knew that something had to be done before he and Lot got angry with each other. They were family after all, Lot was Abraham's nephew, you remember, the son he never had.

Abraham comes up with a solution. Remember, Abraham was patriarch so he could decide, and his decision was that the two of them needed to split up. Now he could have done it how he wanted, in a ruthless way maybe, in a way that we might even expect in a business setting. If we don't split up we will be fighting over the same land and the sparse water and the rulers of this land will easily overtake us. Now once Abraham decides that they needed to separate he should have been the one who decided who got what. He was in charge, he ruled the tribe, he could have gone wherever he wanted and chosen whatever land he wanted.

But instead he turns to Lot and states, go ahead, its your turn. You go first. Now I've been to Bethel and probably at the same spot where the two of them were standing and let me tell you the choices are very clear. You are on top of a plateau and you can see all around you the land of Canaan and the Jordan Valley. If you look off on the right you see the Jordan valley. It is plush and green and flat and easy to get to and settle in.

An ideal place for sheep because of its grass and also for a family because it is not very rugged. On the left it is a very different story. You see a small range of hills, some even could be considered mountains. Canaan was rugged hill country and there was no water in sight. There really is no choice. Lot is probably thinking to himself, you've gotta be kidding me. Do I choose a lush verdant valley or a harsh rugged terrain? Lot is no dummy he chooses the Jordan valley to settle in.

Now the irony of his choice is that we know now that the area that he choose to settle in is a town called Sodom and it had a neighboring town called Gomorrah. That Scripture is coming up, hang on, it should be a crowd pleaser. There was no way that Lot could have known this, they do say that hindsight is always 20/20.

Now what I find interesting in this text is what in the world possessed Abraham to give Lot the first choice?

What we see in these verses is what some might call Abraham's folly, especially those in the business world. But instead what I argue we see is Abraham's faith. Because Abraham believes the promise of blessing that he received from God two weeks ago, he is able to risk everything by permitting Lot to choose first. He doesn't need to be selfish, to think of himself first, because God has promised to look out for him. He actually allows God to be God in that he trusts that God is not going to abandon him and leave him destitute, but rather that God will bless him if he allows God to bless him. Here he is allowing God to bless him.

Can we take this lesson literally in our Christian beliefs as we live our every day lives? If we are in business can we let other people go first? At our jobs are we able to rely upon the promises of God and let others seemingly take advantage of us, knowing that God will someday come to our defense? As homemakers with our family at stake, as students or refugees with our future in front of us do we have the faith to let God be God? I know, you didn't get where you are today by being a push-over. But I say you can go further by trusting in God and allowing for your trust to decide what your next action will be instead of thinking what solution you want and the action that could justify that.

It is when things are going well for us that we run the risk of skipping the request for God's intervention, continual intervention.

The Christian Gospel never allows for the ends to justify the means and when

things are effective or seem to be working, then we tend to forget that important lesson of Christ. This is true in our personal lives and in the life of a nation. If what we are currently doing is against God's will then regardless of the result it is against God's will. When a country which is the most powerful in the world and boasts to be Christian forgets this, or justifies its actions based on results and not on principle, right or wrong, or from my perspective on the Gospel, then we are walking on dangerous ground.

In Acts we find a scene where the Gospel is growing by leaps and bounds but the disciples find themselves at odds with each other. The early church was not perfect. Before the success the disciples could not pick and choose who went with them to evangelize. But here we find that as things go well, well, then the Paul feels as if they have a little more leeway to act out of God's blessing.

Allowing God to be God even in the midst of receiving God's blessings is one of the most difficult things for us to do. We don't let God play the role that he is supposed to and the only role where he is going to make a difference in our lives. We don't mind having a friend in Jesus, that is okay because friends come over to play but then they go to their own home for dinner. We don't mind having a Father who will comfort us when things get too down, but when things are going well then the comforter is not really needed. Time and time again in our lives we decide to turn things over to God, to finally allow God to make a difference in our lives, yet we retain most of our bad and harmful habits. We say that we want Christ to come into our lives but just the parts that need fixing and just the areas where we are hurting. The other places are ours and God doesn't really need to stick his nose in there now does he. Until we turn over every and I mean every area of our lives to God and allow God to be God in our lives, then God will not honor our partial attempts at transformation.

This is especially true when we are at the moment receiving God's blessings. If things are going poorly it is easy to be talked into letting God take over, things can't get worse. But if things are going well, well Jesus himself said that it is harder for a camel to fit through the eye of a needle than a rich man to inherit the kingdom of God. This is what makes Abraham's act so amazing. He was wealthy, powerful, he had everything he wanted, and yet he still looked to God for his strength and support. He didn't need the things to be considered rich. Abraham was able to give up all of his riches if he needed

to because he knew that he was as Jesus states in Luke 12, he was rich toward God. Abraham believed in the promises that God had given him that he would be blessed and he would be a blessing to other. Guess what, God honors this promise and continued to honor it throughout Abraham's life.

This is a good time to let God be God. We need to trust wholly and completely in the promises of God. Maybe you feel like you are being partially blessed by God or not at all. Maybe we aren't allowing God to be completely part of our lives. Let's not just experiment and give God a chance and then turn back at the first sight of trouble. We need to, like Abraham, allow ourselves to be rich toward God, even if that means potentially to be deprived of our material goods. Amen.