The Call of Abram: Genesis 12:1-3

Main Idea: God's saving purpose reaches the nations, and He calls His people to trust His promises, obey His Word, and worship Him as they wait.

I. The Purpose | Genesis 12:1-3

Genesis 11 navigates from the scattered nations to the family of Abram and Sarai, where the account took time to emphasize that Sarai had no child. Now, in Genesis 12, God promises to make Abram a great nation and to bring blessing to all the families of the earth through him. God calls Abram to leave behind the familiar places and relationships around which his life had been built: his country, his relatives, and his father's household. Every loss listed in verse 1 is followed by promises concerning what God will provide. Abram will have a land, become a nation, and receive a great name. The future of this family rests upon the Lord who is making the promises. God gives him a place within a purpose that goes well beyond his own life: "so that you will be a blessing" (v. 2). The promise of protection in verse 3 serves that purpose as well. God commits Himself to the man through whom He will bring blessing to others. We should be careful about claiming Abram's particular promises for ourselves, but we should also recognize how they challenge our expectations of God. **God's kindness draws Abram into purposes much larger than the security of his family. Receiving God's grace means learning to value what the Giver values.**

What does this blessing actually include? We often use the word "blessed" when describing good health, comfortable circumstances, or a successful family. That definition alone leaves us unable to explain how a suffering believer can still be blessed. Galatians 3:8 identifies God's promise to Abram as a promise that He would justify the Gentiles by faith. Verses 13–14 explain how: Christ bears the curse so that the blessing of Abraham and the promised Spirit come to those who believe. Peter makes another important connection in Acts 3:25–26. After recalling the promise to Abraham, he describes God blessing His hearers by turning them from their wickedness. Forgiveness and deliverance from sin exist together in God's kindness. **We can want God to relieve the trouble our sin has caused while still being unwilling to turn from the sin itself. But even if the trouble went away, we would still need Him to free us from the sin that brought us there.** God's blessing includes bringing us under the gracious rule of Christ who died and rose for us. We have reason to thank Him when He exposes sin and leads us to abandon it, even when repentance is costly.

This promise also challenges the focus of our attention. God names "all the families of the earth," including people whose rebellion Genesis has exposed. Psalm 67:1–2 reflects this idea in a prayer of worship: God's people ask for His blessing so that His saving power will be known among the nations. **They understand that God's kindness toward them has a purpose beyond their own well-being.** We can lose sight of that when our prayers and concerns revolve almost entirely around our own lives. We rightly ask God to provide for us, strengthen our families, and sustain our church. But the promise to Abram should lead us to desire those same mercies for people who don't yet know Christ. Through Christ, we have received the blessing God promised would reach the nations, and that should give us a growing concern for those who have yet to know Him. **Jesus sends His church to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:18–20), giving us a responsibility that extends beyond our comforts.** As we learn to value what God is doing in the world, our prayers, resources, and willingness to serve should increasingly reflect His purpose.

To Ponder:

1. How can the way Christians talk about being "blessed" give people an incomplete understanding of God's goodness? What is a Biblical understanding of "blessings"?
2. How can we begin praying and living in a way that reflects the prayer in Psalm 67:1–2?

3. What would taking Christ's command to make disciples of all nations seriously require of our church and the people within it?

II. The Response | Genesis 12:4-9

Abram's departure shows what it means to take God's word seriously. Verse 4 connects his action directly to what the Lord had told him, and verse 5 describes the family and possessions he took with him. His obedience involved the responsibilities of taking people somewhere and providing for them along the way. Hebrews 11:8 calls this faith because Abram went without knowing where he was going. Taking a step into unknown circumstances does not, by itself, demonstrate faith. Abram's decision was an act of faith because he was trusting God and doing what He had commanded. **Taking risks in life doesn't necessarily mean we are trusting God. We need to ask ourselves whether His Word is actually directing our decisions.** And sometimes the difficulty comes from knowing that people we love will not understand or agree with our obedience. God called Abram to leave his father's household, and Jesus teaches that even our love for our parents or children must not come before our love for Him (Matt. 10:37). We should take their concerns seriously and treat them with love and respect. But when their wishes conflict with what God has commanded, we cannot make their approval a determining factor in our obedience.

When Abram arrives in Canaan, the Canaanites occupy the land, and the promise in verse 7 concerns children Sarai hasn't had. Abram has gone where God told him to go, but he is still living in a tent as a stranger. Hebrews 11:9–10 tells us that he was looking forward to the city God would build. He trusted that God would give him a lasting home, even though he had to wait. It is easy to grow resentful when the world around us makes following Christ difficult. But Peter calls believers "sojourners and exiles" and tells them to live honorably among those who do not believe (1 Pet. 2:11–12). **We should expect that belonging to Christ will sometimes put us at odds with the people around us.** That does not relieve us of our responsibility to love them and seek their good. We can continue doing what God commands even when our faith is unwelcome, because the future He has promised us does not depend on their acceptance.

As Abram travels through the land, he builds altars to the Lord and calls upon His name. God has spoken, and Abram worships Him even though he is still waiting for the promises to be fulfilled. Waiting on God can be difficult. The situation we want Him to change can take up so much of our attention we end up with no ability to focus on anything else. **We should bring our concerns before Him, but we also need to remember what He has already done for us through Christ.** Hebrews 13:14–16 reminds us that we are seeking a city still to come and calls us to offer praise to God through Jesus while continuing to do good and share with others. We do not have to wait until our troubles are gone before we are intentional with our worship. We can thank God for the salvation Christ has secured while honestly asking for help with what we do not understand. Verse 9 finds Abram continuing his journey, still trusting the Lord whose promises he has received. Following God requires that same continuing trust from us. **Having obeyed Him, we must keep depending on Him, even when we cannot yet see what He is doing.**

To Ponder:

4. How can we distinguish obedience to God from a risky decision we want God to endorse?
5. How can we stand by what Scripture teaches without becoming bitter or hostile towards those who disagree? What makes that difficult?
6. What helps you remember what God has done through Christ when one difficult situation is taking up most of your attention? How can we encourage one another in this?