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Genesis 12:1-9

The Call of Abram

INTRODUCTION

1. Image: A theme in my life this past week has been the topic of obedience
2. Need: We don't always feel like obeying because we fail to see the payoff.
3. Subject: Why should we obey God?
4. Text: Gen 12:1-9
5. Preview: We learn three things about faithful obedience from the call of Abram
 - a. The promise of faithful obedience
 - b. The requirement of faithful obedience
 - c. The reason for faithful obedience

BODY

- I. God promises to bless faithful obedience (12:1-3)
 - A. God promises to bless Abram if he obeys.
 1. God commands Abram to go to a land that he will show him. (It is costly obedience)
 2. God promises a rich blessing to Abram.
 - a. To be a nation requires two things.
 - b. God's plan to bless humanity despite their sinfulness continues.
 - i. Bless birds and fish (1:22)
 - ii. Bless man (1:28)
 - iii. Bless Sabbath (2:3)
 - iv. Bless man (5:2)
 - v. Bless Noah (9:1)
 - c. God's blessing will reverse the curse.
 - i. Curse on serpent (3:14)
 - ii. Curse on ground (3:17)
 - iii. Curse on Cain (4:11)
 - iv. Curse on ground (5:29) [Noah will save them from curse]
 - v. Noah curses Canaan (11:25)
 - d. God will make his name great to bless others
 - B. God promises to bless his people when they obey.
- II. Faithful obedience requires trust in God (12:4-9)
 - A. Abram needed to trust God when he obeyed.
 1. Sarai was barren. No seed.
 2. Abram may have expected to continue his line through lot.
 3. Canaanites continued to occupy the land.
 4. But God promises to give his descendants the land.
 - B. Trusting God requires us to believe that God knows best.

- III. Obey faithfully because God's past blessing foreshadows future blessing.
 - A. Abram obeyed God because God brought him into the land while foreshadowing future possession of the land.
 - 1. Altars are constructed to express gratitude to God.
 - 2. Abram constructs altars at key locations in the land foreshadowing future conquest.
 - 3. Shechem lies in the middle of two mountains: Mt. Gerizim and Mt Ebal (Deut 11:29. Blessing or Curse. Choose.
 - B. Look at past blessings when obedience is hard because they foreshadow future blessing.

CONCLUSION

- 1. Summary: God promises to bless faithful obedience. Faithful obedience requires trust in God. Obey faithfully because God's past blessing foreshadows future blessing.
- 2. Closing Image: Trust and obey, there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

MANUSCRIPT

A theme in my life this past week has been the topic of obedience. The word: obedience keeps showing up. Jo and I started listening to a series of lessons on parenting. One of the lessons covered the topic of obedience. How do you teach your children obedience? When I attended a small group dinner, we talked about how to discipline kids in relation to obedience. When I studied this morning's passage to prepare to preach, the text talked about obedience. God seems to want me and for us to think about the topic of obedience this morning.

All this discussion about obedience prompted me to think. Why does obedience not feel very good at times? I imagine a kid asks mom at the grocery store: "Can I have a bag of skittles?" Mom answers: "No." To obey means refrain from asking for skittles. But the kid has skittles on the mind and heart. He can taste the colors of the rainbow. He must have it. To obey means having a desire unfulfilled. It doesn't feel good. Think about obeying God's command to share the gospel with unbelievers. They may ridicule or laugh at you for believing in such an outdated religion. You obeyed. But it doesn't feel good. You feel hurt. Embarrassed. Imagine a husband attempting to love his wife per God's command. He stops by the grocery store to buy her flowers to show appreciation for her. When he shows up at home with the bundle of flowers, the wife looks and says: "Don't you remember I hate carnations!" The husband feels hurt. All this effort for nothing.

It made me think maybe we don't feel like obeying because we can't always see the payoff. What is the benefit of a kid refraining from having a bag of skittles? What is the payoff

for sharing of the gospel if we continue to face ridicule? What is the payoff if we love our spouses when they dismiss our display of affection?

I wonder if that's the way we think about God's commands to us. **Why should we obey God?** What should motivate us to obey him? What compels us to follow his instructions?

I think that our text this morning from Genesis answers this question. It gives us a motivation for obedience. It explains why we should obey when we might not see a payoff.

This morning, we're continuing in our series in Genesis. If you weren't here last week, Jason explained that we're taking a break from 1 Corinthians this summer. We're jumping back into the book of Genesis. Our last series in Genesis concludes with the tower of babel. This summer's series will focus on the life of Abraham.

If you haven't turned to this morning's passage yet, then I would invite you to turn to Genesis, chapter 12. Genesis, chapter 12.

We'll learn three things about faithful obedience from the call of Abram. The promise of faithful obedience. The requirement of faithful obedience. The reason for faithful obedience. The promise. The requirement. The reasons. Three things about faithful obedience.

Let's look at the first idea about faithful obedience. The promise. What is the promise of faithful obedience?

God promises to bless faithful obedience. God plans to reward those who obey him. He will enrich the lives of those who follow his instructions. God ensures that those who obey will receive some kind of benefit. **God promises to bless faithful obedience.**

In this morning's text, we'll see that **God promises to bless Abram if he obeys**. If Abram carries out God's instruction, then God will reward him. God promises to bless Abram if he obeys.

Let's look at God's command to Abram. God commands Abram to go to a land that he will show him. Turn your attention to verse 1. *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."*

The instruction seems simple. Abram. Pack up your bags. Leave your family. Follow me on a journey to an unknown land. But what we may not realize the cost. Abram will have to leave the comfort of the city of Haran. He will also need to sever any relational connections. He must take this journey alone. Costly.

But there is a promise. **God promises a rich blessing to Abram**. Look at verse 2. *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.*

Look at the promise. *I will make of you a great nation*. **To be a nation requires two things**. A person needs to have people. It's hard to have a nation of one. This means God promises that Abram will have children. Second, a nation needs to have a territory. This means that God promises to give him land.

The word: blessing is repeated five times in these two verses. What does it mean to be blessed? Moses used the word blessed to describe Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were blessed because they experienced an unhindered relationship with God and they

had all their physical needs met in the garden. To be blessed biblically means experiencing a rich relationship with God and his provision for our physical, emotional, and relational needs.

Remember how I said that word: blessed is repeated five times in this text. Why does Moses use the word these many times in the span of these two verses? If you review Genesis 1 thru 11 again and trace the number of times that blessed is used, then you'll discover that it occurs five times. God blesses the birds and the fish (1:22). God blesses man (1:28). God blesses the Sabbath day (2:3). God blesses man again (5:2). God blesses Noah (9:1). In Genesis 1 thru 11, we discover that God wants to bless humanity and creation. Now in Genesis 12, we discover that the channel of blessing will be through Abram if he obeys. God's plan to bless humanity continues.

But you may be wondering: Why does God still want to bless humanity and creation if it is experiencing the corruption of sin? The word: curse means to render something powerless. Since humanity and creation are under curse, it is never able to achieve its full potential. Now if you do the same exercise of reading Genesis 1 thru 11 and note whenever the word: curse is used, then you'll find that it is used five times. God curses the serpent (3:14). God curses the ground (3:17). God curses Cain (4:11). Moses reminds Israel of the curse on the ground again (5:29). Noah curses Canaan (11:25). One commentator suggested that another reason why blessing is repeated five times in Genesis, chapter 12, verse 2 through 3 is to show how God will reverse the curse through Abram if he chooses to obey. God's restoration of man and creation will occur through Abram.

One last comment. Remember how Jason noted last week the word: name in Hebrew Shem. Humanity attempted to build a tower to make a name for itself. This resulted in God

dispersing them to the end of the earth. Abram is from the line of Shem, name. Here in verse 2, we see the word: name occurring again. Abram does not make his name great. God will. God will make Abram famous if he chooses to obey.

God promises rich blessings to Abram. He promises to make him a nation. God will bless by having a relation with him and meeting his needs. Abram will be the channel through which God will reverse the curse and bring blessing to all of mankind. God will make Abram famous throughout all the earth.

The promise of blessing doesn't just end with Abram. **God promises to bless his people when they obey.** God reward obedience. Before Israel enters the promised land, God presents to them a choice. If they disobey, then they will experience curse. If they obey, then they will experience blessing. (Deut 27-28). Jesus himself says that if we keep his commands then we will experience his love (John 15:10). We can experience peace if we obey God by presenting our concerns to him in prayer (Phil 4:6-7).

Now we can see that there is reward now when we obey. If we refrain from asking for skittles, then we experience various blessings. It will not contribute to tooth decay. This means less visits to the dentist. Lower bills. It will also teach one discernment. How do I discern if something is a need or want? It teaches self-control. I can say: "No!" to things I want but are unhelpful. There are practical benefits to obedience. Think about the benefits of obeying the traffic laws. You can get to your destination safely. There are benefits to obeying your doctor's counsel to exercise regularly. You feel more energized. Your body is nimbler.

One might think: One doesn't need God to obey rules and instructions that benefit us. So why do I need God anyways? How does having a relationship with Jesus help me obey?

Well... I would argue that you might be able to do these things on your own strength. But you'll discover that your strength is limited. You do not have infinite will power. For instance, you know that it would be good for you to reconcile with a friend because of a conflict. But you lack the desire to reconcile because you think they deserve to be blacklisted. They should be on the do not invite list. You lack the resources such as the desire or even willpower to restore such a relationship. If you don't believe in God, then from where will you draw resources from to do this? How do you muster up enough strength to reconcile a relationship you don't want to reconcile?

This brings us to the requirement of faithful obedience. One might equate Christianity to morality. It's a list of things you should do. Things you should not do. If that's the case, then Christianity has little to distinguish itself from other religions. But Christianity is more than morality because it identifies why you're unable to carry out moral behavior consistently. It's sin. The Christian faith not only addresses the root cause of why we can't obey, but also empowers us to carry out the commands of God. This is required for us to obey God. What is this requirement?

Faithful obedience requires trust in God. To obey God requires a faith in God to come through. You need to place your hope in God. You need to believe that God will do what he promises to do. **Faithful obedience requires trust in God.**

We see this trust in Abram's life. **Abram needed to trust God when he obeyed.** He needed to believe that God would do what he said he would do.

Remember the two things needed for Abram to be nation. He needed people and land. But he has neither. In fact, the text highlights the issue of Abram's lack of an heir. Look at verse

four. *So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan.*

First, there's the detail of his wife, Sarai. Recall that earlier in chapter 11, we learn that **she is barren** (11:30). This means that she is not able to produce any seed. If God blesses Abram, then how will he be able to be "fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:28).

Now Abram may have a solution. He may have expected to continue his line through Lot. If you recall, Lot's father Haran died (11:28). Abram may have taken his nephew Lot as an adopted son of sorts. We still have an issue with the descendants. How will God produce heirs from Abram?

No people. The second thing that a nation needs is land. But Abram has no land. The Canaanites inhabit the land. Look at verse 6. *Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land.* The text notes that Abram stops at the oak of Moreh. The word Moreh means teacher. The inhabitants of the land may have worshipped at this location. So not only did the Canaanites occupy the land, but the land is occupied by pagans – people who do not believe in God. How would Abram possess the land?

Now these may be insurmountable problems from a human perspective. But God promises to give Abram's descendants the land. Look at the first half verse 7. *Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land."* Note the contrast. Before in verse one, God spoke to Abram. Here in verse 7, God shows up. God knows that Abram needs

an in-person meeting where God can affirm his promise. This is the first time that God shows up in the Scripture. Look at what the Lord says: I will give you offspring. I will give to them the land. Remember how nation requires both offspring and land. God will guarantee both. Abram needs to trust in God's word.

But what does it mean for us to trust God? It means that we need to believe that God knows best. Trusting God requires us to believe that God knows best. To obey God requires us to depend on his word rather than our own.

Think about sharing our faith. We often talk ourselves out of it. We might say to ourselves: "She's not ready yet. I think she needs to come to church two more times. I'll bring it up then." We might think: "She just shared that she's wondering about why she puts in this time in work, but it feels like a futile effort. If I bring up the gospel at this moment, I'm going to sound cheesy. It's better for me to keep my mouth shut". We talk ourselves out of obeying God to share our faith with others. In those moments, we must remember God's words: *"How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news"* (Rom 10:15). God designed it so that we participate in sharing the gospel with others. Yes. We may encounter ridicule. We may get the cold shoulder. We may feel the awkwardness. All these icky things we experience allows us to identify in part with what Jesus felt to redeem us.

Let's return to those who think: "How does this requirement help me to obey? How does having a trust in God enable me to experience flourishing?" To trust God means to recognize I don't have the resources to love my neighbors. I don't want to reconcile with them. I don't want to be honest toward them. I don't even want to be generous toward them. I need help. To trust in God means that you need his resources. You need his help. God has sufficient

riches to empower you to obey. How do we know this? How do we know that God can empower us to obey him?

To answer that question needs us to think first about why do we obey? What is the reason for our obedience? What motivates us to obey?

Obey faithfully because God's past blessing foreshadows a future blessing. God past provision serves as an indicator of future provision. God's care in the past teaches us that he will care for us in the future. **Obey faithfully because God's past blessing foreshadows a future blessing.**

So how do we see this Abram's life? Abram obeyed God because God brought him into the land. This act foreshadows the future possession of the land by his descendants. Let me put it another way. **Abram obeyed God faithfully because God brought him into the land while foreshadowing future possession of the land.**

In the remaining verses in our passage, we'll discover a word repeated. Altar. **Altars are constructed to express gratitude to God.** Let's look at the latter half of verse 7. *So there he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.* Remember where this altar is built. It's built in the city of Shechem. Let's continue in verse 8. *From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD. And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb.*

Now you'll must wonder: "Why does Abram build these altars at these specific locations?" **Abram constructs altars at key locations in the land foreshadowing future conquest.** What do I mean? Think about the location of Shechem. It is in the northern part of Canaan. Think now of the location between Bethel and Ai. This is in the middle of the Canaan.

The next altar after our text will be built in Hebron. This is in the southern part of Canaan. If you connect the dots, then it represents a type of possession of the land.

Let's revisit the idea of past blessing. Abram constructs altars at these key locations to thank God for bringing him faithfully into the land. But there's another function of the altars. The altars foreshadow future blessing. They foreshadow future possession of the land by Abram's heirs. What motivates Abram's faithful obedience? God's past and future faithfulness.

We have a choice to make. Will we obey God? Will we choose to do what he instructs? Let's look again at the location of the first altar: Shechem. What is the big deal with Shechem? **The city Shechem lays between two mountains. Mt. Gerizim. Mt. Ebal.** If you have read through Deuteronomy, then you'll remember that Israel utters blessings for obedience from Mt. Gerizim. Israel utters curses for disobedience from Mt. Ebal. Abram building the altar at Shechem is a challenge to his original readers, Israel, and to us: will we obey?

Some of you may be thinking: Good for Abram. God brought him into the land. God will give him the land. What does that have to do with us? How have we experienced God's faithfulness? Remember how God promises to bless the nations through Abram. We have received blessing through Abram. What do I mean?

The altars at Shechem, near Bethel, and Hebron represent God faithfully bringing him into the land. But it also represents future possession of the land. But recall what I said about making Abram into a nation. You need not just land. But you also need people.

After Abram constructs the altar in Hebron (Gen 13:8), he builds one more altar. He builds it on a mountain in the land of Moriah (22:9). That altar will represent God's faithful provision of a son. Isaac. But it also will foreshadow the future children of Abram (22:15-18).

God faithfully provides for Abram the land and an heir. He fulfills in part his promise to make Abram a nation.

But how about the blessing? How are we blessed through Abram? What does this altar at the mountain in the land of Moriah have to do with us? Many believe that the land of Moriah refers to the city of Jerusalem. At Jerusalem, another son would be offered up. Jesus Christ. He would die experiencing the curse of separation from God but rising three days later so that we can experience a renewed relationship with God. And if you trace back Jesus's lineage, then you would see that Abram was his forefather.

Why do believers obey God? We don't obey God merely to get his riches and his blessings. We obey God because we have already received the richest blessing in Christ. God's faithfulness to us in his Son resulted in us receiving the Holy Spirit, who empowers us to obey.

As for those of you who wonder why can't I live a good life? Why is it that while I desire to do good, I can't find myself doing it consistently? The answer lies in recognizing that you can't do it on your own strength. You lack the capacity to do good all the time because of sin. If you are willing to recognize your inability to save yourself and place your faith in Christ, then the power to obey will be availed to you as well. It requires you to recognize that God's faithfulness motivates you to obey.

What should you do when you find it difficult to obey God? **Look at past blessings when obedience is hard. These past blessings foreshadow future blessings.**

We can look to the work of Christ on the cross for us. Jesus obeyed God faithfully, so that we might be able to obey God now. It foreshadows the future blessing of a resurrected body

without the presence of sin hindering our ability to obey. With our resurrected bodies, we will be able to obey God completely, joyfully, and consistently.

But God has given us more practical things to remind us to obey. For the couples out there, it may be difficult to love one another. Why do I need to work out another conflict? Why do I need to date my wife? Why do I need to love my husband? When it gets hard, look at your wedding band. May it serve as a reminder that the God who was faithful to bring you together will continue to sustain your marriage. Ask him for help to do things that would help your marriage to flourish. If you obey, then you will experience the blessing of a thriving marriage.

You might suffer from an estranged relationship with your adult children. Maybe they don't call any more. They don't visit. You sense that you need to own up to how you might have contributed to the friction to the relationship. Look at the photos of your children. May they remind you of God faithfully provides these children to you. If God is faithful to provide for you this beautiful family, then God will faithfully enable you reconcile with your adult children. He will empower you to own up to your mistakes and ask them for forgiveness. After all, God has forgiven you of your past transgressions. If you obey, then you may experience the blessing of a renewed relationship with your children. Even if you don't reconcile with your kids, you may experience a renewed peace knowing that you have been faithful to the Lord.

Why do we obey the Lord? We discussed three things from the text. **God promises to bless faithful obedience. Faithful obedience requires trust in the God. Obey faithfully because God's past blessing foreshadows future blessing.**

Let me close with the chorus from a familiar hymn. **Trust and obey, there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.**