Grace for the Nations

## Grace from the Patriarchs

## By Steve Viars

**Bible Text:** Genesis 12:1-9

**Preached On:** Sunday, May 31, 2015

### Faith Church

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A couple of weeks back, I had one of those travel days that you would not wish on anyone. I was headed out to teach a Word of Light Bible Institute up in Schroon Lake, New York, which is a rather remote spot on purpose. It was originally purchased by Jack Wyrtzen. He was a marvelous evangelist in New York City. In fact, this particular picture is of Madison Square Garden completely packed out in order to hear him proclaim the truth of the word of God. And as Wyrtzen was seeing more young men and young women come to Christ from the inner city of New York, he wanted a place that he could bring them away from that environment even for a limited period of time where they could enjoy one another, they could understand more of the truth of the Gospel, more of just basics of Christian living. So the Lord provided a place on beautiful Schroon Lake where they developed Word of Life Ranch for junior aged children, Word of Life Island for high schoolers. They started a family camp, a conference center, a family lodge. They still attract over 15,000 campers every year. It's now an international ministry by God's grace. They serve in 66 different foreign countries. It's really a marvelous, marvelous story for sure.

Well, Jack and his cofounder, Harry Bollback, who by the way is still alive at 90 years old, also wanted to develop a one-year Bible Institute where some of these high school graduates coming especially out of the inner city, would be able to come up to remote Schroon Lake and study the word of God intensively for a full year and then use that training in leadership positions in their summer camp. So they started Word of Life Bible Institute. In addition to their permanent teaching staff, they also bring in guest lecturers who many times in one week will teach their students through an entire book of the Bible or some other important topic in Christian living. Well, I've had the opportunity to be one of those guest lecturers now for 20 years and I'm kind of a segue guy. I teach a class right toward the end of May on biblical counseling and I help these students take all of the Bible knowledge that they have received and be prepared to use it in practical ministry opportunities as they are counseling with young people at their summer camp.

So it's a marvelous opportunity but the point is: Schroon Lake, on purpose, is not a convenient spot to travel to even on a good day. Well, a couple of weeks ago, I am traveling from Indie to Philadelphia, then flying to Albany, New York. I get to the airport in Indianapolis and I was told it was going to be a full flight and because of my zone number, I might as well just give them my bag right then because there wasn't going to be enough overhead space. You've all been in that situation, right? The cynical side of me that I try to rein in in my head wanted to say, "Should I just kiss this bag goodbye right now?" But I have learned over the years not everybody thinks I'm as funny as I think I'm funny. Please don't say amen to that. And so I just with a smile on my face did what I was told. In retrospect, I should have kissed it but anyway that's getting ahead of myself here.

So anyway, I get on the in Indie flight without my bag and not surprisingly the flight up to Albany has been delayed. It's already going to be a multiple hour layover at best and now they're telling me it's going to be 4 hours in the Philadelphia airport before that flight is going to take off to Albany. But I had plenty of work to do. The church gives me plenty of technology to do my work wherever I have to be so I hunkered down at a place there in the airport and just started slaying emails. Some of you know what that's like. You kill one, two come to the funeral but the bottom line is I tried to get through all of my email. But I also positioned myself near an airport monitor because I've also learned over the years that sometimes postponed and, again, I don't want to be cynical but sometimes postponed is airline speak for, "We are going to cancel this flight but we don't think you need to know that yet."

So I'm watching the monitor, watching the monitor. I also hear some urban legend going on around the other travelers who were complaining about the fact that the reason everything was shut down was because the President had come to town and I had actually been in that situation before where when Air Force One shows up at your airport, nothing else is going to happen for a period of time. So I'm just wondering, "Okay, is this flight eventually going to be canceled?" Well, look up at the monitor assuming my flight is either still postponed or just canceled and it says it is leaving on time. I'm shocked. I look at my watch and I say, "Wait a minute, if it was leaving on time, I'm in big trouble because I've been sitting here now for several hours doing my work." So I closed up my computer and I'm getting all these papers flying all over the place. Running down to my gate so I don't now miss my flight. People are getting on a plane from that particular gate but it's not the one to Albany and so I go back to a monitor and I don't know why they said it was leaving on time because now, sure enough, it said my flight had been canceled. The last flight that day up to beautiful Albany.

Now, Word of Life really needed me up there to start teaching early the next morning because of some things that were going on in their schedule so I checked with someone who said, "Look, it would take 5 1/2 hours to drive up the East Coast through New York City to get up to Word of Life." So I said, "Well, I guess that's what I'm going to have to do," and I'm starting to check out what time is that going to put meet tomorrow morning. But that's what I was going to have to do so I find out that the phone number for Hertz because I'm going to rent a car, they've got it right there in the airport and I assume I'm talking to the person who is right there at Hertz in the Philadelphia airport and I'm trying to rent a car and I'm explaining to this woman that I'm there in Philadelphia and I'm just trying to get to Schroon Lake. Well, she didn't even understand where Philadelphia was, much less Schroon Lake and so in my sweet voice as you would always expect, I just casually said, "Well ma'am, where are you?" She said, "Well, I'm in the Philippines," and so another opportunity to praise the Lord and so I called my contact at Word of Life and I said, "Look, why don't you work with this gal in the Philippines and get me a rental car while I go fetch my bag."

So I go down to that office to learn that 40 flights had now been canceled and there are a whole lot of people wanting to fetch their bags and I finally get to the front of that line and give the person my information and he says, "Well, it will probably be 30 minutes to an hour before they can find your bag because So-and-so is out looking for them." One guy out looking for all of these bags and he said, "He'll be back here in a little bit just to kind of report on the status to everybody." So I waited for that fellow, the bag puller guy and he comes out and he announces that there is so much luggage he's trying to find, it will be 3 to 4 hours before they'll have our bags if then. That's when I decided that the clothes I was wearing right then would be the perfect outfit for tomorrow morning when I teach and who really cares if I brush my teeth anyway. So I just said forget the bag and so I get to the bus that's going to take me to the Hertz rental car place but by then everybody and their mother had decided that they were going to rent cars too so we are waiting, waiting, waiting for the bus. Finally the bus comes. Everybody crams on the bus. There is no place for this poor lowly pastor trying to make his place in this world so I wait for the next bus which oddly enough, I end up being the only person on.

So I'm driving over to the Hertz rental car place with the Hertz guy, just me and him, and I'm looking at the traffic. It's wild and I'm thinking, "Wow, I'm going to be in this traffic in just a few minutes," so I start talking to this fellow. He had an island accent, a little ponytail on the top of his head. I asked him how long he had been doing that job. He said 10 years. I just asked him, "Hey, how many accidents have you had?" Because I'm thinking I'm about to get into this hot mess. "In 10 years driving this big bus, how many accidents have you had?" He said, "Well, none. I've never had an accident." I said, "Wow, you must be a really good driver." And then he said to me, "Oh, it's not me, it's the grace of God working through me." Now, that wasn't pastor speak. I hadn't told him yet that I was a pastor. In fact, honestly in that situation, I generally hold that information off for a while for just all lot of reasons, in case I meet the "ding-dong the church is dead" woman or, honestly people sometimes just kind of shift into pastor talk whenever they find out I'm a pastor.

So the guy, not even knowing who I was said, "Well, it's not me. It's the grace of God working in me." You can imagine his shock when I quoted our church's theme verse, "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need." Here's the point of all this: it was amazing the calming impact that his testimony had on me. Yes, I was tired. Yes, I had a challenging drive ahead of me. But if God's grace was sufficient for him over those 10 years, God's grace could certainly be sufficient for me that evening and perhaps the lesson is: there are all sorts of ways and there are all sorts of places where you end up finding grace. Finding grace.

Now, with that in mind, would you open your Bible this morning to Genesis 12. Genesis 12, that's obviously in the Old Testament, the first book of the Bible. It's on page 8 of the front section of the Bible under the chair in front of you if you need that this morning. So Genesis 12 or page 8 of the front section of the Bible under the chair in front of you.

You know, we've been studying this concept of finding grace in all sorts of ways this year, haven't we? We started with what amounted to a theology of grace from some of the most central passages in the word of God on this subject. So we did an exposition for several weeks in Romans 5 which is all about grace. Then we switched over and we looked at 2 Corinthians 4. Then that great passage in 2 Corinthians 12, just mining all we could from the Bible about the topic of grace. Then we went to a smaller section of Scripture just prior to Easter. We walked through the latter chapters verse by verse of the great Gospel of John and we were looking at God's grace during the death and burial and resurrection of Christ. Well, then after Easter for the last several weeks we have been talking about family of grace and many of us have found some very important lessons there for sure. Well, this summer we're going to be working in the book of Genesis. We're talking about grace from the patriarchs, these delightfully instructive stories of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Joseph.

Now, Genesis 12 is where all this begins. In fact, if you know your Bible, you know that we are now in a chapter that is just theologically pregnant. This is surely one of the most important chapters in all of the Bible. It's crucial to understand the rest of the Old Testament, the rest of the Scripture and even understanding many of the geopolitical events that are occurring in our world today. Genesis 12, beginning in verse 1,

1 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." 4 So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. 5 Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the persons which they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan; thus they came to the land of Canaan. 6 Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. Now the Canaanite was then in the land. 7 The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him. 8 Then he proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with 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. 9 Abram journeyed on, continuing toward the Negev.

We're talking this morning about "Grace for the Nations," and I'd like us to see in the time we have remaining 3 ways God shows his grace to his world, 3 ways we can find grace right here in Genesis 12. First of all, God makes gracious promises even in the midst of human failure and misery and confusion. I want to give you a little homework this morning. Are you up for that? Some of you have been worried. You've got the summer ahead of you. You're going to be kind of bored. I'm going to help you right now with a little bit of homework. Don't you love that? A pastor who loves you to stay away from boredom. First of all, I would encourage you if you are around our church, you won't be surprised by this, if we're going to be studying the book of Genesis this summer, I would encourage you to read through the book of Genesis and try to become more familiar with what this great book is all about. Now, I know many of you well and you would say, "Well, can I have some extra credit?" Yes, you can. If you really want to do well, I would encourage you to plan to read through the book of Genesis several times in different English translations of this book. That will be even more helpful. Now, I know some of you are even especially high achievers. I appreciate that. You want double extra credit, don't you? I appreciate that. Here's what I would encourage you to do: read through the book of Genesis in a study Bible and take time to actually read the explanatory notes and go through some of the cross-references so you really get this book in your heart.

Now, we jumped in Genesis 12. If you know your Bible, I hope you're thinking about some of the events that would have preceded Genesis 12 and what I'd like us to see first of all is that it's amazing and instructive that after everything we read or we read in the first 11 chapters of the book, the Lord would still come to the human beings he had made and relate to us in the form of grace filled promises. There it is. What was it that the bus driver said to me? "It's not me, it's God's grace working through me," and that's what we just read, God relating to people through grace filled promises.

Let's take a quick survey through the first 11 chapters of Genesis. It starts with the privilege in our creative design where we would read a crucial verse like Genesis 1:26, "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule.'" Now, if you are in the habit of writing in your Bible, I would encourage you to write that or underline that because that's so crucial, "Make man in Our image, according to Our likeness: and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." You know that later in that text human beings are commanded to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. Well, what about this initial command and promise where God has brought kosmos, orderliness, out of what appeared to be initiative chaos and then the highlight of his creation was forming a man and woman who was in his very image and likeness? Now, the persons to whom the book of Genesis would eventually receive this book would have immediately recognized the significance of that terminology because in their world when a conquering king wanted others to acknowledge his power and supremacy, he would erect a statue of his image and his likeness to represent his character and his authority to that nation.

Well, God's point in Genesis 1 to human beings was, "You're designed to be my image and my likeness. You are a visible manifestation of the invisible God to image and declare his glories of the great King." What an incredible privilege. What an incredible honor which is why it's so sad to read of their failure in the garden. Satan's temptation was to question God's authority, to question God's goodness, to attack the image. In Genesis 3:1, "Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Indeed, has God said, "You shall not eat from any tree,"'" there's the lie, "from any tree of the garden?" At the moment that human beings had the opportunity to live out their created purpose, to counter that attack on the character of God whom they were to image, they miserably failed. But even then, God gave them a promise. Genesis 3:15, "And I will put enmity," God now speaking to Satan, "Between you and the woman, And between your seed," Satan, "and," ah-ha, boom, always remember this, "her seed." Strange way to talk about a descendent, "the seed of the woman." That's Jesus. "He shall bruise you on the head," Satan, "and you shall bruise him on the heel." Now, we're going to have to be very disciplined with our time in this study but I would encourage you to note that phrase, "her seed," because that's going to become a very prominent theme throughout this book. We're going to see it in Genesis 11 in just a minute and it's also an indicator of God's grace.

Well, think now about where the story leads: the downward spiral even in the family whereby Genesis 4:8, Cain is murdering his own brother, from a God who is the giver of life to a marred representative who violently takes it. Then later in that text, many consider Genesis 4:23 and 24 to be the first recorded song in the Bible where Lamech murders a man and then brags about it to his own family in a song, possibly the first recorded song in the Bible being about gratuitous murder. "Listen to my voice, You wives of Lamech, Give heed to my speech, For I have killed a man simply for wounding me; And a boy for striking me." Now we have multiple wives and senseless murder and we're not even out of Genesis 4. How is that image and likeness thing working?

So you have creation and the fall, that's the first story you need to remember in the book of Genesis. Then you have the flood and what were the conditions like before the flood? "Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence." Now, if time allowed, we could begin to also establish the important theme of CFR, creation/fall/redemption. Creation/fall/redemption. Creation/fall/redemption because at each one of these stories, there is also a small but definite glimmer of grace and righteousness and salvation even in the midst of failure and misery and confusion. But the direction of mankind left on his own is always downward and it's always destructive, further and further away from the design and the purpose for which we were created.

So you have creation and the fall. You have the flood and then you also have the pride of man at the tower of Babel where, "They said, 'Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make a name for ourselves,'" there it is. "Let us make a name for ourselves, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth." So instead of being fruitful and multiplying and filling the earth as they had been designed and commanded so God's glory could be manifested, they sought to make a name for themselves. And by the time you get to the end of that chapter, you read these words in this genealogy, "Abram," there's our man, "Abram and Nahor," remember, this is Genesis 11 just prior to the verses I read at the beginning, "took wives for themselves. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and Iscah." Notice this, "Sarai was barren." Remember 3:15 seed? "Sarai was barren; she had no child." Instead of the seed of the human race being positioned to crush the forces of evil, the seed of Abraham and his sin cursed race had effectively died.

Now, here's the overall point: what would you expect to read now in chapter 12? God wiped his creation off the face of his earth? Or God heaped on additional commandments to force their obedience? Or maybe God removed their will so they could only choose to do right? No, here's what we read instead: God comes to a man named Abram, whose name, by the way, literally meant, do you know? "Father of many." And he makes gracious, undeserved, precious and powerful promises to him. Now, let's pause there for a second because you may be here this morning and would say, "You know, Genesis 1 to 11 sounds like a retelling of my life. So many examples of failure and misery and confusion. I wonder what God would have for me this morning?" Well, here's the answer to that in a nutshell: first of all, you're in good company because there are no perfect people here. Could I get a, "Yeah, that may be true"? Then secondly, here is what God would offer you: the marvelous promise. Just like he came to Abram with a promise, he comes to you with a marvelous promise of the Gospel, the good news of the second Adam, the ultimate seed of the woman, the Lord Jesus Christ whose death, burial and resurrection makes it possible for sin cursed man to be forgiven and redeemed. A message that is encapsulated in promises that sometimes are as simple as Acts 16:31, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." You see, God had promises for Abram and God has promises for you.

Now, what about the rest of us who would say that we have already embraced the truth of the Gospel? We've placed our faith and trust in Christ but we're now thinking about what does life and ministry look like in a culture that is more like Genesis 1 through 11 than ever before? Here's the answer: to rejoice in, to live out and joyfully proclaim the marvelous promises of God. The grace filled promises of God. Like Peter said, "Seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness," ding-dong nothing as long as Jesus is alive. "Granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these," hear this, "He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises," there it is, "so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust." You see, praise the Lord that he often chooses to relate to imperfect people through the lens of magnificent promises. There is nothing more gracious than that.

Now, what else do we see in this text? God invites us then to embrace his promises by faith. You see, you've got to decide if you're going to believe and then act on God's promises to you. That would have been hard for Abram because what the Lord tells him in this text is simultaneously amazing and terrifying because there are statements that are only going to come to pass if God is who he says he is in contrast to all the foreign gods that his family had previously been worshiping. Abram has to decide if he's going to believe it.

Now, it's very important to remember the threefold provision of the Abrahamic covenant. I realize you might not have gotten up this morning with the great hope that your pastor would talk to you about the threefold position of the Abrahamic covenant but this is really important, alright? So important that I just may call through the membership of our church this morning about 2 AM and before you can remember even your name, I'm going to ask you, "What is the threefold provision of the Abrahamic covenant?" And you are going to be able to nail it. Are you ready? You want to know, you need to know the threefold provision of the Abrahamic covenant. Some of you are thinking right now, "Does he have my number or not?" You're all worried about that.

Well, here's what it is: first of all, land. Land. "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.'" That's why people even in this day in the Middle East are arguing over the land. Think about it from Abram's perspective: he was a nomadic shepherd. They didn't own land. You stayed together as a family clan. You go place to place looking for suitable locations to graze your herds. Sure, those clans could become quite wealthy in doing so but your strength, your protection humanly speaking was by staying with your clan and constantly being on the move. Now this new God comes, Yahweh, Jehovah, the Lord, and he comes to Abraham and tells him to leave his family safety and protection and familiarity and he will be given a land of his own.

The writer of Hebrews, I think, captures the significance of Abram's response. Hebrews 11:8, "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going." Anybody here find themselves in that situation right now? "By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God." You see, it's one thing for God to promise you something, it's something else for you to believe his word and to act on it.

So, what was the first provision of the Abrahamic covenant? Land. The second is: seed. Genesis 12:2, "And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great." There is a head scratcher because Abram was 75 years old and how many children did he have at that time according to Genesis 11? Not even one. And Jehovah's promise was that he is loving and powerful enough to make Abram and Sarai a great nation. You can imagine, by the way, Sarai's response to all of that and we're going to study that important part of the story, Lord willing, next week.

Now, I realize if you're new to studying the Bible you might say, "Wait a minute, we keep going back from Abram to Abraham. What is the guy's name?" Well, at this point it's Abram. God is going to change his name in a subsequent conversation but just think about it from where we are right now: Abram is introducing himself to somebody else who says, "What's your name?" My name is Abram, which everybody understands means "the father of many." What's the next question in that conversation going to be? "How many children do you have, father of many?" Well, none. None. Can you hear the snickers? Can you sense Sarai's embarrassment and shame? And as I said, later in this story God is going to change Abram's name to Abraham, from "father of many," to "father of," what does Abraham mean? "Father of many nations." Even before he has child one. How do you explain that to the people you're taking to Canaan? And just to peek at that part of the story, by faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive. So what promise is God asking you to embrace? "By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who," there it is, "considered Him faithful who had promised. Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that," and that's talking about his ability to conceive children, by the way, in case you're saying, "I'm 75. What does that mean?" "As dead as that, as many descendants as the stars of heaven in number, innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore."

So Jehovah promised them land, seed and what's the third provision of the Abrahamic covenant? Blessing. Land, seed and blessing. Land, seed and blessing. Have you got that in your brain? Land, seed and blessing, 2 o'clock is coming this morning. "And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great." Well, here's the question: how did Abram respond to these promises? Well, by leaving his family and leaving their pagan gods. Genesis 12:4, "So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him," and I would suggest to you the brevity of that statement is astounding but it answers a core question that every person has to face: how can I live in a way that is consistent with my God-given purpose to visibly represent him? Answer: by believing and acting on his gracious promises. Have you had opportunities to do that this week? By embracing and then acting on his gracious promises and therefore being a visible demonstration of your invisible God? Which is why the New Testament affirms, "For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.'" The centrality of faith through grace and later in this text so crucial for this reason: it's by faith in order that it may be in accordance with grace. Now, if you're in the habit of writing in your Bible, there is a great one to underlying right there, the relationship between faith and grace. "For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all." Do you know the song "Father Abraham"? I thought about teaching that to the congregation this morning with the actions. You know how that goes? Let's not but what a great, great text, "Father Abraham."

Well, let's turn this around then to you because here's my question for you this morning: what gracious promise is the God of heaven asking you to believe and act on? For some it might be his promise regarding establishing a relationship with him. I'm so glad for the number of people who have been attending our church who are asking questions about, "How can I know for sure that I'm on my way to heaven?" And it if you wonder, "Does anybody ever take you up on the invitation to come and talk to one of the pastors about that or talk to someone else in the church family?" Absolutely. Absolutely and we're in high cotton on that question right now and I'm so glad for that. Ding-dong, the church is alive. Ding-dong. That was off my notes, okay, so if that was just a little bit cynical, you would praise me if you knew all the things I didn't say.

Now, think about, here's a promise, about as simple as it gets: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish." There it is. There's your promise. Will you act on that but have eternal life? How about his promises regarding our daily walk? "Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight." You realize there will be all kinds of men and women who will hear this message today and you could point to evidence of you doing that this week, where what you chose to do or what you chose to say would make no sense at all unless God's promises are true and you embraced them and you were going to a city whose architect and builder is God.

What about his promises regarding trials and suffering? Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have for he himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you." I recognize we have a number of men and women who are going through deep water right now and what you're holding onto is the cross and all of the precious promises that cross typifies in your heart and your life, including because of your faith in Christ, your belief that he will never leave you or forsake you.

What about his promises regarding your service? We have all sorts of people, in fact, the vast majority of people who come to this church are also involved in some kind of service for God. Any promises about that? Here's one of them, "For God is not unjust," Hebrews 6:10 says, "so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints." You know, I mentioned last week if you were here for Memorial Day Sunday about some of the challenges we had in Faith West. That was a great journey for sure but here's the other side of that: it was also a marvelous time of faith for this church. It really was because some of you who were around at that time remember all we were trying to do was identify a piece of land and build a facility where we could have a home plate for our campus ministries and also for the biblical counseling center that would be located near the center of campus and where we could provide that kind of ministry to students and staff and faculty and people who lived in that part of town. Well, it became very difficult for us to be able to find a piece of property that met our needs, that the city was in favor of us developing, and so we went a couple of years trying to figure that out and prayed and prayed and prayed. Some of you remember the day when we took a weekend and just fasted over that issue and then went over to several different pieces of property in West Lafayette and just got together and prayed, called out to God for clarity on that matter. Then when 1920 Northwestern became available, that was a big project, far bigger than we had originally envisioned and we had to look in the mirror and we had to look at one another as a church family and say, "Is that really what God's will is for us?" And we decided yes which meant correspondingly there was going to be a capital campaign, 3 years of special giving determined by this church in order to make that project possible. Do you realize there were over 700 families, not individuals, families who said, "I want to be part of that project of bringing that cluster of ministries to West Lafayette as part of this journey of faith."

Well, what has happened, that brings us to a very important aspect of God's grace: your faith, our faith in God's promises is intended to be a blessing, not to ourselves, intended to be a blessing to the nations. That's what was stated in this original conversation so think about how wicked human beings in Genesis 1 through 11 had functioned and God still chooses Abram, makes marvelous promises to him so he could in turn be a blessing to those who had rejected God. "And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great," and here it is, "And so you shall be a blessing; And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you," hear this, "all the families of the earth will be blessed." You see, how does the Lord relate to the nations of Genesis 1 through 11 who are rejecting him? By raising up people who will believe God's promises and in turn be a blessing as a manifestation of his grace.

You see that same theme throughout Scripture like in this great passage, Isaiah 49:6, "He says, 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations,'" there it is. "So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth." Or this marvelous text, you've got to love this, Psalm 67:1, "God be gracious to us and bless us, And cause His face to shine upon us, That Your way may be known on the earth, Your salvation among all nations." Or this one, you can't even study Abraham without this one, Galatians 3:8-9, "The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham," that's amazing, "saying, 'All the nations will be blessed in you.' So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer."

Aren't you glad we have the privilege of being a blessing to the nations? By living out and telling others about the gracious promises of our God? And we're seeing that in many of our ministries but since I have mentioned Faith West a couple of times, where are we now? We're in a position where we have all sorts of opportunities to be a blessing to all of the international students that God brings right to this town and just rejoicing in and proclaiming the new life that is available in Jesus Christ because of his great promises. Well, how is it going over there? Well, you've got the "ding-dong the church is dead" thing or you can just listen to people who are on the ground. Listen to their testimony.

Speaker: It's an exciting time to be involved in international ministries at Faith Church. As God has sent us more and more workers, more and more international students and professors are coming to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Speaker: Psalm 67 is being lived out right here in West Lafayette, Indiana. God's face is shining upon us as his salvation is becoming known throughout the nations.

Speaker: Sharing the Gospel is more than a one way street as people at Faith are learning to sit down and open their Bibles and read through Matthew or John for the first time with someone who has never read the Bible. They are witnessing God at work. Hearts are being changed as the internationals are hearing about the grace of God for the first time and Faith Church people are getting to watch God work firsthand.

Speaker: Before coming to Purdue 10 years ago, I had never shared the Gospel with anyone. When Matt asked me to study with one of the international students, my first thought was, "I have never even taught a child about Jesus," but God is so incredibly gracious and has been with me every step of the way. He has been growing me and encouraging me. Being used by God to share his word with others and see his grace at work has been one of the greatest blessings in my life.

Speaker: So who can share the Gospel? Well, if you're watching this video this morning, you can share the Gospel. Right now I'd like for us to hear from Hannah Lee and Daniel Moore, 2 young people who by trusting in the promises of God and stepping out in faith have been sharing the Gospel with international students.

Hannah Lee: I have had the privilege of serving in the international student ministry here at Faith Church for about 4 years now. While I have seen several international students come to Christ during that time, I have never been the one to walk a student through the final steps of accepting Christ. I can't tell you how amazing it was last Sunday when God gave me the opportunity to share his grace with a student from Korea. When she finally told me that she was ready to accept Christ, my mind was thinking, "What do I do now? I have no idea what to say." But God was faithful. He gave me the words to speak and he guided me through a prayer with her. This was an incredibly humbling experience because I recognize that it is only by God's grace that he allowed me to witness a changed heart.

Daniel Moore: And I have had a similar experience in PVFI to Hannah where I have been involved for about 3 years with different Bible studies and one-on-one contacts but it wasn't only until recently that I actually got the chance to walk through the final steps of someone accepting Christ so I was kind of surprised about a month ago when a graduate student from China, that he approached me about needing to talk about what it means to become a Christian. And we had only talked about Bible for just a little bit before that so I was a little skeptical and a little nervous going into it but I prayed to God so that he would give me wisdom in what to say and after we had a good long conversation about what it really means to be a Christian and what the Gospel really means, he decided to accept Christ and I was just amazed that God would use me as just a small piece in the puzzle that he was using to bring him to a saving knowledge of him. This has definitely encouraged me to share my faith with more people.

Speaker: It is an exciting time to be involved in international ministry at Faith Church but it's going to get better. In 10 weeks, over 2,000 new international students will be arriving at Purdue University, 2,000 new opportunities for you and I to be a blessing to the nations.

Well, 2 questions for you as we close: what if you embrace God's promise of new life through trusting in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ? And if not, we want to talk with you and we'd be happy to have you contact us and we will sit down when it's convenient for you and help you get to the place where you know that you know that you know that you're on your way to heaven. Christian friend, what promise is God asking you to embrace and act on? I would encourage you to be just like your father Abraham.

Let's stand together for prayer, shall we?

*Father in heaven, Lord, thank you that you would choose to relate to us so many times through the lens of precious promises and I pray that you would help us to be people of faith. I pray that we would look for opportunities this week, this day, to embrace your promises by faith because of your great grace and choose to act on them. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.*