

All the Families of the World

Sunday, March 8, 2020 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

Scripture: Genesis 12:3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

Introduction: Theologians consider this passage to be the Old Testament equivalent of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). In that famous passage Jesus, after His Resurrection, spoke to His disciples and said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." I believe that every church mission statement is a variation and application of this great mission statement for all congregations. This passage in Genesis likewise tells someone to "go" and it echoes through the ages and forms the backdrop for the Great Commission. It is, in a way, the first missionary statement in the Bible.

Set the stage

We pick up the episode in Genesis with Terah, who took his family, including his son Abram, daughter in law Sarai and grandson Lot and moved from the city of Ur, west of the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates River, to Haran, far to the northwest. So Abram and his wife had already spent most of their lives far from their home town. After Terah's death, God speaks to Abram and tells him to leave and go to another country, without giving him specific directions. God says that He will make a great nation from Abram's family and that in him all the families of the earth shall be blessed

Blessed

The word, blessed, is a primitive word with the original meaning "to kneel", with the idea that one kneels when blessing God, but also God can bless a person by causing them to prosper in some fashion. Our understanding of this verse is that it is fulfilled in Christ and that the defining feature of those blessed is not ethnicity but trust in Almighty God. Galatians would quote this verse in describing people saved by faith in Christ (Galatians 3:7-9). Revelation (7:9-10) would claim that there would be people from every people group following Jesus. This verse makes Abram the original missionary and this the great missionary statement of the Old Testament. All the families of the world will be blessed in Abraham

How Close Are We To This?

According to the website "globalfrontiermissions.org" there are 7.67 billion people on the earth. Of that number, 3.19 billion are in unreached people groups, that don't have a church established or the Scriptures translated in their language. Out of a total of 17,307 people groups, 7,375 of them are unreached; that's roughly 43%. Less than 10% of missions work take place among unreached people groups, often because it is dangerous to do so. Fortunately, indigenous people from people groups that are culturally and linguistically closer to them than us are taking up the mantle. People groups that earlier generations of missionaries dedicated their lives to serve are now involve in missions themselves, and that is good news.

Application: every healthy church must take missions seriously

Some are called to leave their family and their people and live as refugees in another land, with another culture and another language in order to be used by the Holy Spirit to bring blessing to all the people groups of the world. Abram's journey mirrors and dovetails the life of a missionary. I knew a fellow who spent some time as a missionary in Indonesia. He was trained in survival, building his own home, and learning a language with no teacher. But he could climb up a hill and call me in the States with his cell phone. They are extraordinary people who deserve all the support we can give them. What they want most is our prayer support. Furthermore, we can pray for people groups who do not yet have a church established among them. There are even prayer guides made for this. You can download it from www.fmalliance.org or ask me to make a copy for you.

Conclusion

In conclusion, God asked Abram to leave his nation and his family and follow God to another nation in order to start a nation. He lived as an immigrant, and as a missionary. The promise that in him all the families, or people groups, of the world will be blessed is being fulfilled by the ongoing missionary endeavor that is at the heart of the church's mission by Jesus. Any healthy church takes missions very seriously, both in support and in prayer.