

Genesis 12

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[0:00] I'm turning to Genesis 12. Last week we looked at verses 1 to 3. This week I want us to look at the whole chapter. Genesis 12 verse 8 of the church Bible.

So we got our first gold at the Winter Olympics on Friday night, didn't we? Matt Weston won gold in the skeleton. I hope we just won another gold today. The momentum is slowly building, isn't it? Think about winning Olympic gold. There's nothing like it, is that? Olympic gold, it's just the pinnacle of sporting glory, isn't it? Your name forever goes down in history. Matt Weston, he already films the headlines. You become a national hero.

But the road to that glory is pretty unglorious, isn't it? We see Matt Weston on the podium with that gold around his neck and all the cheers. But what was the journey to that podium like?

It's all the unglorious stuff that we don't see. It's the early mornings, the early bedtimes, the brutal gym sessions, the lonely runs in the rain, the chicken, rice and broccoli every day.

[1:16] It's all those Saturday mornings as a teenager, his dad driving him to Sheffield and back, all the training. It's being that nobody for years and years, just hoping for that podium.

The right to glory is pretty unglorious. In fact, it is no glory at all until you actually get there.

And that is just like God's promise of glory here in Genesis. In this cursed and fractured world, God came down to Abraham and laid out his plan of how to save all of this.

He set out his plan to bring this unglorious world to glory. That's what we saw in Genesis 1-3 last week. So to a lonely, scattered world, God says, I promise to make a new family.

To a world cast out of Eden, God says, I'm not going to give you a new home. And to a world under the curse, God says, I'm not going to bless you.

[2:26] And you see in verse 2, God promises to make Abraham's name great. This is the promise of glory. And this is ultimately the promise of glory in the new creation.

That that was what Abraham was being promised. It was something beyond Canaan, beyond the Middle East, beyond what we can see here. It is a restored world and a redeemed people, all under the blessing of God in a new creation.

That's God's plan set up right here in Genesis 12. And it's the plan each and every one of us is longing for. It's the end of this curse.

The end of sin. It's the promise to finally belong to God again. God is promising the podium right here. But how do we get there?

Well, as we look at what God is doing with Abraham right here in this chapter, God is showing us how each and every one of us can get there. You can think of Abraham.

[3:34] Abraham is like the model of how we come into this family and get to glory. So last week we looked at the plan. Now I want us to look at the man.

And like Olympic gold, we are seeing today that the journey to glory is actually pretty unglorious. And glory, it doesn't just come straight away.

But unlike the Olympics, for those a part of this plan, glory is guaranteed. There is no disappointing missed gold here.

No. Glory is certain. And unlike the Olympics, this glory isn't for the best or for those who have worked hard and earned it.

No. As we look at Abraham, we see God is calling the unlikely to glory. So if you want to be a part of God's plan to bless this world, to save it, and undo this curse, this is how you get to glory.

[4:38] God is calling the unlikely. That's my first point today. God is calling the unlikely. How does all this road to glory begin with Abraham?

It begins with a call. That's why. Now the Lord said to Abraham, go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

So how is God restoring this world? How is he undoing this curse and bringing salvation and starting this new family and bringing them to glory? He's calling.

God speaks to Abraham and calls him into this plan. And it's a surprising call, in fact. Because actually, Abraham is one of the unlikeliest people to call at this point.

If you know Abraham, if you know your Bible at all, and you can just have a picture of Abraham in your head, we know that Abraham, he's a great example of faith in the Bible.

[5:42] But he wasn't in ways. At this point, at this call, Abraham is a complete pagan. In the book of Joshua, it says, it references Abraham, it says, Abraham is worshipping idols when this call comes to him.

He's not a spiritually obvious choice. And also, look at his age as well, verse 4. How old is he? 75 years old.

And on top of that, what's his family like? It's he and Sarah, and they have no children. He is the least obvious choice to start a nation with.

So it's not like Abraham is the godliest man on earth, and he's young, and he has a big family, and he can grow even more, and he's ready to go. No. Abraham is completely unlikely to be part of this plan.

Yet what does God do? He calls him. And God says, I'm choosing you, Abraham, to be a part of my plan to save the world.

[6:55] This is how God brings people to glory. This is what God is doing in this cursed world. He is calling the unlikely. So if you are wanting to know how to get to glory, you need to hear this call.

And Abraham heard this call, and maybe it was audible. Maybe he heard a voice from heaven. But if we need to hear this call, where do we hear it?

Where do we hear this call? Well, this call, it's in the gospel. The gospel is God's voice into this world. God's call to a cursed and broken humanity.

A call to be a part of this grand plan. To have these promises. The call to be blessed in this new family. It's the call to glory. Just think, what did Jesus do as soon as he began his ministry?

He called. What are some of the first words he says? Follow me. And who are the types of people Jesus calls? It's the unlikely.

[8:05] It's fishermen. Tax collectors. It's sinners. It's the Abrams that are described. It's not those who have got their act together with a perfect life.

The obvious shining choice. No, Jesus calls the undeserving. It's the unlikely from his calling. Those are the ones he is calling to glory.

And it's the same call that began with Abraham. And it's the same call that continues today. God is calling us today to come and follow his son. Belong to this grand plan and this eternal family.

Have these promises. And come and belong to glory. And you don't need to have your act together. No, God says, I am calling you. I am calling you the unlikely.

And for those of us who have heard this call. We know that's true, don't we? We see how God has called us into this family.

[9:04] Promised this glory. And we know what we were like when God called us. And we look at our lives and we can't help but say, I am the least of his choice.

Yet, God calls. Whatever state your life is in. If you are in any doubt about this, just speak to any Christian here tonight.

God really is calling the unlikely. But the question is, will we follow this call? And we see it all right here with Abraham.

Abraham. That this is how you get to glory. And so wonderfully, the road to glory, it's not like the Olympics. It is not about us putting in the hours and earning glory in my power.

No, you can only reach glory because of God. Because of his grace in first calling. God, he could have kept silent. Abraham could have just kept living his life.

[10:07] And the curse could have just continued into this world. And God would have kept silent. But God spoke and everything changed. And if you hear God's call and you follow it, everything changes for you.

And what does God say in his call? Verse 1. Go. Abraham, get up and go. Go to these blessings. Go and belong to the renewal of this world. Go and head to glory. Go and go. And so do you see that this call involves something? This call involves going from something and going to something. If you want to get to glory, we need to see that God is calling us to go to a world unseen. That's my second point today.

God is calling us to go to a world unseen. And did you notice where Abraham was when God called? Look at the end of chapter 11, verse 31. Abraham was living in Ur of the Chaldeans.

[11:15] And this is significant because Ur was a big city hub at the time. It was kind of the London of the day. That's where Abraham's whole life was.

And God says, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. This is the call that he hears.

Go from your people and your life and your comfort and your security and everything you know. Abraham, leave that behind and go.

Go to a land that you haven't even seen yet. And I promise you a people who aren't even born yet. And I will bless you and make you great. There will be glory. But that glory and that greatness, you won't even live to see.

[12:12] Abraham, just listen to my voice. Leave your life behind and go. Go to a world unseen. And with remarkable faith, he just goes.

Verse 5. He takes his wife, Sarah, his nephew, Lot, packs their bags and he goes. And what does he go to?

An empty land. Canaan. With no greatness. No people. In old age, 75, unlikely calination come from him.

The whole thing just seems pretty impossible. God has promised Abraham a glorious world. But right now, that world is unseen.

The road to glory is very unglorious for Abraham. It is a life living with the promise of glory, waiting for it, hoping for it, expecting the impossible, but without ever seeing it.

[13:20] You might have heard of the 12-year-old Australian boy, Austin Appleby, in the news recently. It's an incredible story. A few weeks ago, Austin and his mum and his two siblings, they got stranded miles out to sea, off the coast of Australia, on their paddle boards.

And they were out there for ages, in the hot sun, and they were getting desperate. And so, Austin, he swam back to shore to get help.

And so, over the course of four hours, Austin swam four kilometres through shark-infested waters in the hot sun, back to the beach.

He reached the beach, ran two kilometres to the phone, called for help, and saved his family. And rescuers said, what he did was superhuman.

And it really is. Try swimming four kilometres, in open water, dehydrated with sun straight. It is impossible. He did the impossible. And just think about Austin's mum in those four hours.

[14:32] Four hours of floating, staring at an empty horizon, knowing what her son has to do, and waiting for the impossible to happen.

Well, that's just like Abraham. He heads to Canaan, staring at an empty horizon of a barren land, staring at an empty family, no glory to be seen, just floating in the unknown, and waiting for the impossible to happen.

And that is what God has called Abraham to do. This is what God's call to glory looks like. It is a call to go to a world unseen.

And that is the Christian life. That is what the gospel has called us to do. That there is a world waiting for us.

Rescue is over the horizon. And it may all just seem impossible. We are here just trying to faithfully serve God, here on this earth, following the Lord Jesus.

[15:41] But it all just seems so very un-glorious, doesn't it? Even mundane. I'm called to glory, but look at my life. I'm just feeling my

life changing endless nappies.

I'm promised glory, but my life, what does it look like? It's just going to another geography class. It's sitting at a desk, eight hours a day, again and again.

I go to church, I follow the Lord Jesus, I know these promises, but look at my life, it is far, far from glorious. God has called us, yet life just feels small, and irrelevant, and pretty mundane, and that's not even to mention all the darkness of the Lord.

And the idea of a new creation, it just seems so far off, doesn't it? I can't even imagine how that will happen. I can't even picture how I will exist without sin, or have a resurrected body, or not feel pain anymore.

But the idea of Christ returning from heaven, with his angels, and that actually to be justice in this world, and sin to end, it can almost feel like fantasy, can't it?

[17:03] Like we're floating in the ocean, staring at the horizon, and it just seems like God has promised the impossible. But this is when we need to realise what we are called to.

God has not called us to glory now, God has called us to wait. Wait, and trust in his promises, trust in God, that though we cannot see that glorious world yet, we must trust that he is bringing us there. And so this life, this life we live now, this is a life walking by faith, and not by sight.

So just think of all the ways the Christian life is described. We're on a pilgrimage. We're in the wilderness. We're running a race. We're in a war.

We're exiled. We're a bride betrothed to Christ, but the wedding isn't here yet. The groom hasn't returned. So just as Abraham walked the land of Canaan with no glory to be seen, just a promise ringing in his ears.

[18:16] Well, for those following Christ, we now walk this earth with no glory to be seen, or with a promise ringing in our ears, a promise that glory is just over the horizon.

And that is what faith is. Faith is not just vaguely thinking something is out there. Faith is not just a blind leap into the dark. No. Faith is knowing there is something unseen up ahead.

Faith is knowing God has told me that there is a world I cannot see yet, but he's told me it's coming. Faith is knowing God's promises are certain, and faith is clinging to those promises, waiting for that world to come, even though I cannot see it, even though it seems impossible.

And so God calls us today, leave behind whatever is keeping you from following Christ. Leave behind thinking this world is all that there is.

Leave behind a life thinking this world is our home, and this is where we can find blessing and greatness. Leave it all behind, and go to a world unseen.

[19:33] And God says, I promise you it's there, and I promise you it is all yours. Just by faith, wait for it.

And how do we wait? We wait by worshipping. Did you see what Abraham did when he reached Canaan? Verse 6. He stops at a place called Shechem, the battle in the north of Canaan.

Verse 7, what does he do? He builds an altar at Shechem. And then verse 8, I'm going to look, he heads to Bethel in the south, and again, builds an altar.

In this empty land, no people, no glory to be seen, just God and his promise, what does Abraham do? He worships. That's what these altars are, that these are places of worship.

But they are also more than that, that they are also like little flags planted in the ground of Canaan. It's like in these altars, God is slowly claiming the land, claiming this one little patch, bit by bit.

[20:46] And though Abraham can't see it, as he worships at these altars, he is recognising and trusting that one day, all of this will be claimed by God. But this is how Abraham waits for that world unseen.

He worships. And that is just like us do. As we worship God Sunday by Sunday, here in this room, we are recognising that glory is not here yet.

But one day it will be. But that's what we're doing right now. We are all here standing on God's promises, it's ringing in our ears, knowing something unseen is coming over the horizon.

We are gathering as Christ's body because we know he will one day return. And so right now, God has planted his flag, his kingdom has already come into this world, into our lives.

The flags are here, and as we worship, God is saying, one day, one day, one day, one day, an unseen kingdom is going to be seen, and it's going to fill this world.

[22:03] And how do we wait for it? We worship. But it's not easy, is it? So many things can make us believe that that unseen world isn't coming.

We can float in the ocean and think, no one's coming back. I need to do something else there. And we are not alone in feeling that because that is exactly what Abraham went through.

As we keep following this man in this chapter, we see, yes, we are called to go to a world unseen, but fear keeps us here in this world. That's my third and final point today.

Fear keeps us in the world here. This next section of Genesis, from verse 10 to 20, it might have felt a bit odd if you read it.

You might be wondering, what's it doing here? We get in the plan and now this story about Egypt. But I want us to see that this section is Abraham, out of fear, doubting all of these promises.

[23:12] So look what happens, verse 10. Now there was a famine in the land, so Abraham went down to Egypt to such a man for the famine was severe in the land. Now, where did God say to go at the beginning of this chapter?

But where did God say to wait for the promise of glory? It was Canaan. But a famine hit Canaan and Abraham thought, no, this isn't right. God has brought me here but now I'm just going to die here but there's no blessing here.

It's kind of like Austin's month, thinking there's no way Austin can return. And so out of fear, what does Abraham do? He leaves Canaan. He leaves the promises behind and tries to maybe get to glory another way.

So he pushes God's plan off the table and he starts drawing a new one. What does he do? What does he say? Okay, me and Sarah will go down to Egypt.

Maybe we'll find a blessing there. And so off they head, leaving the land behind. There's a problem. That's another. Abraham knows that his wife is very beautiful.

[24:24] And so he gets scared and thinks, well, if they know I'm her husband, they're just going to kill me and take her. Well, how about, we don't say I'm your husband, let's just say we're brother and sister.

Then they won't touch me. But what happened when they entered Egypt? Pharaoh saw Sebaid and took her to be his wife. And yes, Abraham did live.

And he even found blessing with Pharaoh. Pharaoh gave him a fortune. Do you see that in verse 16? Sheep, oxen, donkeys, servants, he gets them locked. But what's the problem here?

The blessing is meant to come through Abraham's offspring. And with Sarah gone, Abraham's just shut that off. If his family is meant to be the stream of blessing into this world, this is like Abraham putting a dam in the stream and stopping it all.

And so out of fear and because of a famine, Abraham abandoned the land, abandoned the offspring and settled for blessing with another king.

[25:36] He couldn't figure out how that unseen world could come. He got scared and so he settled for the world here. And it looks like a little bit of glory, doesn't it?

And fear can have that effect on us. When the Christian life is not just unglorious, but it seems like it's just not worth it at all.

You know your promised glory, but when the heat of work just increases, the heat of school increases because of your faith, or the online mob starts coming for our church, we can think, oh look, this isn't right, this isn't worth it.

This is too much hassle, let's just settle in Egypt. Or we can fear God has asked me to give up too much. Leaving behind my old life, it's too hard and this call is too much and it's like there's just a famine of joy in my life.

And we can just think, what is the point? I can go and find happiness in so many other ways right now. And so we walk away through the crisis and we just settle in Egypt.

[26:53] It is astounding at how easily we can give it all up. Just out of fear. But look how God deals with us when we do.

Look what he does with Abraham verse 17. He sends a plague on Pharaoh's house to make Pharaoh realise what's going on. And he does, doesn't he?

And so Pharaoh quickly returns Sarai and gives Abraham everything and sends him away quick, going back to Canaan. And do you realise what God is doing here in this moment?

This is God protecting his promises. This is God graciously dealing with a man who has walked away. This is God calling a man an unlikely man filled with fears and doubts and who could have ruined everything.

And God is protecting this man and making sure he is going to get to glory. And that goes for all of us. While we are called to go by faith to a world unseen, we are not going in our own strength.

[28:09] God in his power and his grace he is bringing all those whom he is. He is bringing us to that world unseen.

You are not going alone as you walk this earth. God is bringing you there every step of the way. And so you can have great confidence that when God calls you and you trust in his promises he will without a doubt bring you to that world.

God is and we can be sure of that most of all because Christ has already prepared the way for you. Because it is Christ who walked this earth with a promise bringing in his ears the Father's promise of a people to be his own, his bride, the church.

And a promise for this world to be all his kingdom, the nations to be his inheritance. And the promise of greatness that every knee should bow to him and all the blessings of God to belong to him, that was the joy that was set before him.

But on earth all of that was unseen. Instead he walked this earth living such an unglorious life. A man of sorrows acquainted with grief, despised and rejected.

[29:38] His life threatened because of God's call. You could say he walked through a famine every day of his life. And it would have been far more comfortable for him to abandon these promises.

He had every opportunity to fear and doubt the glory to God, but he never did. But instead because of the joy that was set before him, he endured that unglorious life, endured it even to the cross.

And he came out the other side and entered into that unseen world. He saw that glory to come. And so how can we be sure that that glory is coming when Christ has already gone there for us?

And he didn't just go for himself. He went ahead to prepare the way and to prepare a place for all those whom he has called. For those in Christ, as he emerged from that grave and entered into the glory of heaven, he won for us a new home, a new people and all the blessings of God.

And he is right now, this moment, he is seeing what we cannot see that. And he is waiting there to bring you home. And so as we float here, waiting in the ocean, be assured, Christ is there just over the horizon, coming for you.

[31:16] And he's protecting you every step of the way until you're finally home. home. And so God is calling, calling us to a one-one seed.

And so by faith, follow this call. But even then, when you fear your faith may fail, Christ can hold you fast. Let's pray.

Let's pray. Thank you.