

**Sermon: Abraham and Jesus: Go and bless**  
Genesis 12:1-9, Romans 4:1-4, 13-17, John3:1-17  
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We have gone through chaotic years here in Egypt and the end is not in sight. What will happen during the presidential elections in the weeks ahead of us? Will the country have enough petrol in summer? Will we face major blackouts at those times we would love to run our air conditioners?

In Syria the civil war continues unabated. There is fear of war in Ukraine. Northern Nigeria is the scene of savage butchery again and again. The Sudanese government continues to hammer the small Christian minority. "God, save us from these evil regimes and from bad people!"

We also need salvation from the horrors of nature. Sickness and death, earthquakes and tsunamis. There is hunger in the area of our churches in Ethiopia, in Gambella.

There are so many reasons to get depressed about what happens around us. But it is too simple to just blame others, or circumstances, or nature. Mankind is terrifyingly good at messing up and each individual, you and I included, is part of this mess. We are not just victims but we also offenders. We all add, at times, to the unhappiness of others.

We need to be saved from the mess of the world, and we need salvation from our own inner tendency to add to the mess.

**1. Abraham lost in Babylonian life**

The first few pages of our Bible begin with sin, and murder, pride, marriage problems, wickedness. Quite a realistic view of mankind. The world was a scary place to live in, but the Creator wanted his people to go into this world and to develop it.

One of the first epic stories of mankind, registered in the Bible, is the story of the people in Babylon. They wanted to build a strong monumental city with a high tower.

Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth."

Jewish Bible commentators stress that this decision to not spread over the earth was Babylon's crucial act of disobedience to God. The builders of the city wanted to gather the people in one central location exactly in opposition to the expressed will of God.

But this Babylonian attitude was so logical, so natural! We also love to hide from the chaos in the world. We do not want to be scattered. Scattered means disunited, and weak, vulnerable.

Being in one place feels nicer, safer. Outside there are so many dangers. So away with God and his commands. The Babylonians had no interest in lifting up the name of God; they cared more about creating a great name for themselves.

The people in Iraq in those days had done away with God their creator, but they were still very religious, o yes, worshipping a host of gods. The most important of these was called Sien. The Sinai Desert is named after this moon-god.

Some years ago I visited Iraq. Babylon and its tower are gone, there are just potsherds and broken tiles on the empty hills. But in the National Museum in Baghdad I saw the beautiful leftovers of that culture; I was amazed how developed those people were. They had amazingly beautiful jewellery, statues and utensils. Really a rich culture.

In their efforts to keep evil out, they had build a beautiful cultural life around themselves. But to sit closely together was not what God wanted for his people. God has a vision of salvation for his whole world!

So God did something only he could have thought of... he saw this elderly couple, Abraham and Sarah. They were to become the beginning of Gods mission of global redemption.

Abraham was part of that idolatrous world of Babylon. He was a rather wealthy man; he was not doing bad at all. But Abraham was also lost. I think it is fair to assume that he also worshipped the gods of that land - the moon god included - and that he also desired to be strong and to have a great name.

But we meet with Abraham in his weakness. He had no son of his own; he and his wife were childless. This was disastrous. It meant no future. There was no one to maintain the name of the family. No one who would later say, "I have been born from the family of Abraham." His name would be lost...

How often Abraham must have sat on the roof of his house, staring at the moon at night. Wondering why the gods had not blessed him... Why is my life as it is? Why am I not like the other people, with children?

Is that how you feel today? What is wrong with me? Why has God not given me a better life? Why no better job. Why so much misery around me? I try my best to create a perfect life but I continue to mess up?

God is not far way from people who feel personally lost and weak.

## **2. Plan of God for Abraham**

God then spoke to Abraham. He first spoke this one important word: Go. Abraham was to do the opposite of what Babylon did. Do not stick together but leave. Go.

God said to Abraham: Leave your country, leave your nation, and leave your family. This was so totally counter-cultural. Do what no one in your society would do. And in this context of complete sacrificial obedience, God also said:

Go [and] I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. [...] all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

Babylon wanted to be a great nation, to have a great name, so it did not go into the world, But God calls us to go into that world, that messy world, to develop it, to bring God's light, his name, his blessings to all mankind.

We must not curl up within the secure walls of our 'safe' countries, our sweet churches, our homes. God calls you also to go out into the world – to be His blessing to the world.

In the midst of the turmoil of our time, the pattern of God is not for us to sit tight and wait till the storms are over – he calls us to leave our comfort zone, and face the storm, and obey his command to be with the people, with all people, and to develop his earth.

For Christians, the arena of economy, politics, social life, agriculture, factories, law, university, school, is where we must be. What do we do for solving the problems of our nations?

It is sad that in our churches we so often focus on the inner life only, and too frequently we have forgotten that the Gospel is a message for our souls, yes, but also for the societies we are part of. Yes, we need to speak about the need for personally being born again, and about the urgency for internal change; but God also wants our heart and mind focussed on life in this world.

I was therefore extremely glad with the common statement of the Egyptian Church leaders, including our own bishop Mouneer, of 24 February 2011. In this statement they said:

We urge the great people of Egypt to fulfill their national duty through active and positive participation in the political life and their contribution in rebuilding Egypt of the future which embraces all the children of this dear country.

What have we done since then? If we hide inside our pleasant social life of church, with each other and with God, we may be building a new Babylon of false security and false stability. We are called to go out and fulfil our Christian role by preaching and living the Gospel. This includes our positive participation in society, in political life, in building this nation.

That sounds scary – the present chaos can seem so frightening. But if we desire salvation, we have no option: salvation begins with trusting in God and then going out and being his servant in this world. That is what we are called to as Christians and as a church.

Obedience to God is the central issue. This is true for us personally just as much as it was true for Abraham. Just as later, Jesus, the greatest offspring of Abraham was "made obedient, unto death, even unto death on a cross." (Phil 2:8)

Abraham's obedience was crucial for us. "In you all families of earth shall be blessed", God told him. This promise means that in one way or another, Abraham plays a role in our salvation.

### **3. The son of Abraham**

"To your offspring I will give this land". What a great promise to an old man with an old wife who had never been able to have children. God's salvation is definitely not man-made. It is 100% Gods gift. No wonder Abraham worshipped God.

A great and strong nation, Israel, grew up as the physical offspring of Abraham. God created a whole new family, a new nation that was called to serve and worship Him. They were called to reject the Moon god and all other gods, and to worship the creator of the world only, Yahweh.

But the promise to Abraham received a much more superior fulfilment than the nation of Israel; from Abraham our Lord Jesus Christ was born.

The apostle Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, goes so far as to suggest that the promise of God to Abraham was really first and foremost about Jesus Christ. Listen to what the apostle writes:

Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring – his seed. It does not say, "And to offsprings – your seeds," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring – your seed", who is Christ.

In his letter to the Church in Rome Paul says that Abraham is the father of us all, not just of Israel alone. He is the father of all who believe in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the one who effectively brings this blessing of Abraham to us and to all nations.

If our faith is focused on Jesus Christ and on obeying him, we become so much part of Jesus Christ, so attached to him, that with him, in him, we become family of Abraham.

Through our faith we are part of the covenant relationship that God created with Abraham. And with Abraham, through Jesus Christ, we inherit all the great blessings and promises of God.

It means being born again into a new family and into a new land, the eternal kingdom of God. And we receive the great name promised to Abraham. We have the name of the Son of God stamped on our life.

We are part of God's redeemed nation – and we are called to not hide from the chaos around us.

## **Conclusion**

Faith in Jesus Christ involves letting go of the false securities of the cocooning life of Babylon. Even of the sweet life in church. Just as God said 'Go' to Abraham, so Jesus also says 'Go' to his followers. Go into the world to bring good news - by your words and by your deeds.

Let us, as God's redeemed community, stand in the midst of our world so full of pain and problems and participate fully in it, for being God's mouth and hand for the good of all and for the glory of his name.

**+ Amen**