

Genesis 14:8 Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) marched out and drew up their battle lines in the Valley of Siddim ⁹against Kedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of Goiim, Amraphel king of Shinar and Arioch king of Ellasar—four kings against five. ¹⁰Now the Valley of Siddim was full of tar pits, and when the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some of the men fell into them and the rest fled to the hills. ¹¹The four kings seized all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food; then they went away. ¹²They also carried off Abram’s nephew Lot and his possessions, since he was living in Sodom.

¹³One who had escaped came and reported this to Abram the Hebrew. Now Abram was living near the great trees of Mamre the Amorite, a brother of Eshcol and Aner, all of whom were allied with Abram. ¹⁴When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan. ¹⁵During the night Abram divided his men to attack them and he routed them, pursuing them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus. ¹⁶He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people.

¹⁷After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley).

¹⁸Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, ¹⁹and he blessed Abram, saying, “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. ²⁰And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.” Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

²¹The king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself.” ²²But Abram said to the king of Sodom, “I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, and have taken an oath ²³that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, ‘I made Abram rich.’ ²⁴I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me—to Aner, Eshcol and Mamre. Let them have their share.”

EVERY GIFT OF GOD IS BETTER SHARED

Dear Friends in Christ,

If you were here with us over Labor Day weekend, you remember Genesis chapter 12. The LORD came to 75-year-old Abram and told him – Did you hear how old he was? He wasn’t some young kid with his life in front of him, he was 75 years old! The LORD came to 75-year-old Abram and said, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.” I would really like to know what his wife said when he shared this one.

Well, Abram and Sarai obeyed, left, and they never came back. They went like the trailblazers who came to Kentucky 230 years ago. They crossed over into a beautiful, bountiful land. Lots of space. ...Except there wasn’t lots of space. Genesis chapter 12 tells us that when Abram arrived in the promised land, “At that time the Canaanites were in the land.” Abram got to his promised land and looked around and said, “Hey, God, you promised me some real estate. So I get here, and it’s full of people.” And the LORD just tells him, “To your offspring I will give this land.”

Now I might be tempted to say at that point, “Lord, you made it sound like the land would be mine,

now. But now you say it's for my descendants." Do you know what Abram did? "*He built an altar to the LORD.*" He worshiped God.

That was chapter 12. One detail we left out was that Abram had made the big move with one relative, a nephew named Lot. But in chapter 13 uncle and nephew had a parting of the ways. Lot went to the choice part of the promised land, and he chose to live next to the city of Sodom. As you know, Sodom was a den of iniquity. Meanwhile Abram lived up on the mountain ridge about 30 miles away. And that brings us to today's reading.

I. Using Blessings for Others

So Lot was living in Sodom. How long? We don't know exactly. It was less than ten years but could have been as short as several months. As he lived out his new life in Sodom, world politics came crashing down on him.

This was all taking place at the end of the third millennium B.C. The world's first empires were taking form in nearby Mesopotamia. Over in Mesopotamia kings went to war, subjugating the tribes around them. They kept on chewing up real estate until they reached Palestine, where Abram and Lot lived. In the custom of the day, since the conquerors didn't have an extensive governmental system that we have, they didn't exactly "rule" distant conquered areas. Instead they demanded tribute, protection money. Kind of like, "It'd be a real shame if something happened to this tidy little country you have here. But we could make sure nothing happens if you hand over a few hundred pounds of gold." After a dozen years, the kings around Abram – and these guys weren't "kings" like we think of kings, but actually chieftains ruling areas no larger than counties – several kings around Abram got tired of paying the protection money and they rebelled. Lot was living in the city of one of those uppity local chieftains, the king of Sodom.

Eventually the big boys came back with their armies and settled the issue. They pumpled the rebels—including the king of Sodom—sacked their cities, and started for home, not only with all the wealth they could carry, but also with hundreds, maybe thousands, of slaves. And one of them was Lot, Abram's nephew.

Now that is a lot of background for this story. But it puts the real story in front of you. Abram, like us, lived in the real world. There are forces much bigger than us out there. Sometimes we can ignore the outside world, sometimes we can't. Here was Abram with the conflicts of the world impinging on his reality.

When he found out that his nephew, Lot, had been taken captive, Abram surprises us. Abram was patient, extremely patient. We often put patience together with inaction. But here we see a patient man who knew when to act. Abram could have said, "Look, these foreign kings are just too powerful. I mourn for Lot. I really do, but what can I do? They are empire builders. My empire is a bunch of sheep and cows." Instead, Abram emptied out the bunkhouse and put a weapon in the hands of his 300 men. Then he went to the other wealthy, powerful men around him, raised the militia, and went after the invaders.

If anyone ever wonders about the justification for war, or thinks that pacifism is the best policy, read the 14th chapter of Genesis. Notice that Abram *did* remain out of the rebellion and warfare as long as he could. He had allied himself with neither side. But there came a time when he, the Father of Faith, had to arm himself for a just cause.

Abram took after the invading army. Kedorlaomer's army was probably pretty disorganized at this point. Ancient armies celebrating their victories tended to be undisciplined. Abram and his allies compensated for their inferior numbers by a daring night attack. The enemy was routed. In the process Abram recovered the captives, and of special interest he rescued his nephew Lot.

Abram, sitting on the hills of Palestine much blessed by God, had counted what was important. He

had risked everything in defense of his family.

We overlook the risk. We look back and think, “Of course, God blessed him and made him victorious. He’s Abram. God couldn’t let him lose.” But that is not what it looked like at that time to the eyes of Abram, and especially his wife Sarai, I imagine. These foreign armies had overrun several city-states. What chance would Abram and three wealthy landowners have? And who ever said that things always end happily for Christians? Have you known Christians who lost their lives for country and family? We know that God blesses his people. But sometimes his blessings come through adversity and tragedy. And so as Abram left his tents he surely had a little bit of fear in his heart. Like us, he could not see the outcome.

Abram, who had been blessed by God, chose to use God’s blessings for of others. Even at risk to himself.

III. Testifying that It Is God Who Blesses

Of importance for us today is what happened when Abram returned. As he got near home two kings came out to meet him.

The first king was the king of Sodom. The Bible tells us nothing of the character of the king of Sodom, but we can guess from the reputation of the city he governed. (The long-time Christians among us know that the city of Sodom was annihilated by the Lord because of its great sin. But that was still 15 or 20 years in the future.)

The king of Sodom, came out to meet Abram to make a request. He was overjoyed to see his many citizens returned. He comes out and says, **“Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself.”** At first, it sounds like the king is making a very generous offer to Abram: Let the people return, and you keep the all the goods. Actually, the king of Sodom was asking Abram a big favor. In the ancient world, to the victor belonged the spoils. And since the captives had been liberated from their captivity by Abram, they now belonged to Abram. It sounds barbaric, but those were the “rules of war” of that day. So even in asking that the people be allowed to return to their city, the king is asking a pretty big favor of Abram. Abram does him one better. Not only will he return the people, he says that he will take none of the goods either. This was generosity unheard of! A man who risked life and limb, wealth and reputation and asked no reward for his efforts.

Abram wants it to be obvious that he never entered this warfare for any sort of profit. It was a just war for a just cause, and profit was not a motive.

In addition to that, Abram wanted *God* to be glorified. You can debate whether it is a good thing for a running back to praise God in the endzone, but essentially that is what Abram is doing here. Abram is saying, “We won. But I want people to know that I succeeded only because God gave me success.” That is what he is preaching to the king of Sodom when he said, **“I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, and have taken an oath that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, ‘I made Abram rich.’”** God gets the credit!

IV. “Blessing” Him Who Has Blessed Us

When I read you a few verses (like our reading) from Genesis, you get a snapshot of Abram’s life. Genesis contains about 15 episodes from the life of Abram. When you read Genesis chapters 12 to 25 as a unit, you watch a movie. And what you see is a living relationship between Abram and the LORD. As you read those chapters, you see a rhythm to life. The LORD calls, Abram obeys. The LORD encourages, Abram worships. The LORD blesses, Abram uses the blessings to help others. The LORD gives success, Abram gives God credit. It’s like the breath in our lungs. Abram was constantly breathing in God’s many blessings, and Abram just had to give some of what he received back to God—all the time. That is the rhythm of life for a Christian: the cycle of receiving from God and

giving back to him.

And so the last words of our reading we consider are these: ***“Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, ‘Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.’ Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.”*** Coming back from war after risking everything, after declining his just rewards for his risks and efforts, Abram still felt a need to give something to God.

Did you notice what Abram gave to the priest, Melchizedek? He gave 10%, 10% of everything. Do you know where Abram got the idea to give 10%? No? Neither do I. Because it’s the first time giving 10% is mentioned in the entire Bible. The “law” to the Israelites that they were supposed to give 10% didn’t come along for another 500 or 600 years. 10% was Abram’s joyful, cheerful freewill response to what God had done.

Giving 10% to God is no law for us either, but it can be a good target. The important question is, Do you live in thanksgiving to your God? Are earthly blessings the goal? Or are they merely tools to gain a greater eternal goal?

It is unfortunate that we in church have to talk about money. On the one side, there is the reality that pastors do not have daily showers of manna falling around the house like the Israelites in the wilderness. And our church building did not drop out of heaven one day back in 2011, but was constructed by people needing a paycheck and with materials that had price tags. But you know what, the bills are a good thing. Because if there were no cost to our worship, money would be our god.

That is the need side of things. But don’t concentrate on that. Need was not what guided Abram. God’s blessings guided him. Look at the blessings you have now and have experienced in the past. See in your life the hand of a faithful God who has treated you like he treated Abram—who has made his promises to you, whose mercy has saved you, who encourages you day by day with his Word, who continues to bless with more than you need.

In Jesus’ name, may you consider your response to God’s goodness. Amen.