

Sharing

"Foundations of the New Normal" | August 22-23, 2020

Genesis 12:1-3; 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

Pastor Rob O'Neal

Valley Community Baptist Church

WE ARE AMBASSADORS.

Last week, we established that we are ambassadors.

We are citizens of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus has sent us out with a commission to represent him and make disciples of all nations.

We represent King Jesus to the nations and people of the world.

We speak on behalf of King Jesus. People hear the voice of God speaking to them sometimes when you speak for King Jesus.

We embody the values of the Kingdom of God. In other words, when people know that we are Christians, they think, "This is what a Christian is like" when they see us.

We advance the interests of the Kingdom of God. We want the Kingdom to grow and thrive.

Finally, we serve the people of the land where we live.

Patrick (called Saint Patrick) embodied what it means to be an ambassador of the Kingdom of God.

Patrick grew up in the early 400s in Roman Britain.

He was taken as a slave when Irish raiders looted his hometown when Patrick was 16.

Patrick kept his master's pigs. This was a lonely, desperate period for him, and it was when he turned to the Christian faith that his parents had tried to teach him.

Six years later he escaped and made his way to Europe and eventually home to Britain.

In his late forties, Patrick obeyed a calling to come and share the Good News in Ireland.

Having lived there for years as a young man, he knew the language and the people well.

Patrick had always loved the people of Ireland and longed to see them follow Jesus.

Patrick assembled teams (sometimes of a dozen people) to go into a new area.

His teams would establish outposts outside of villages.

They would speak to the leaders and share Christ with them.

They shared their faith boldly and served boldly.

They worked hard alongside the people. They brought people together and healed conflicts. They served and healed the sick. They shared stories and made the Gospel relatable. Patrick was so successful that much of Ireland had Christian churches within a generation.¹

Notice that two rhythms work hand in hand here.

As we discussed last week, Patrick and his teams served the people.

They also boldly shared the Gospel, sometimes running into conflict and great danger.

It's just what Jesus talked about when he commissioned his apostles in Matthew 10. It's exactly what Jesus calls us to do as his ambassadors. We serve people and share the Good News.

Wait, is all that really necessary?

I recognize that when I start talking about being ambassadors of the Kingdom of God, there are some people who will stop listening immediately.

People who stop listening are probably thinking, "That's not for me."

In fact, there are Three Common Objections to Being Ambassadors:

- 1.** That's something God does. I'm not included. People with this objection believe that reaching people is God's job. It's a theological position that says that God knows who he is going to save and there is nothing we can do to change his mind.
- 2.** That's something I can't do. I'm not prepared. People with this objection think that they wouldn't know what to say to explain the Good News about Jesus, so they choose to stay silent for fear they might mess something up.
- 3.** That's something I won't do. I'm not willing. People with this objection are just clear that the thought of sharing the Good News with people makes them uncomfortable. They don't want to, so they aren't going to do it.

I've heard all these objections. And if this is how you feel, please know that I hear you.

But let's look to the Bible today to see what the Bible says about sharing the Good News.

Do these objections make any sense given what the Bible says?

If not, then what does God expect from us? To get us started, let's look at the Old Testament.

BLESSING BEGS TO BE SHARED.

In Genesis 12:1-3 we find that the life of Abraham shows us that blessing begs to be shared.

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Genesis 12:1-3)

¹ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-60/patrick-saint.html>
<https://americananglican.org/news/remembering-st-patrick-and-celtic-christian-evangelism/>

As we start, we find that God told Abram to make a dramatic break with his past.

Abram came from a pagan family that lived in Ur of the Chaldeans, a major ancient city in the southern part of Mesopotamia on the Euphrates River.

His father, Terah, decided to move from Ur to Canaan. So he set out with Abram, his wife Sarai, and other members of the family. However, they stopped in the town of Haran located in Northern Mesopotamia, well short of Canaan. They settled there, and Terah died there.

Then in Genesis 12 God told Abram to make a dramatic break with all of that.

God told Abram to leave behind his adopted home, all of the relationships that they had built, and nearly everyone from his father's household. God wanted Abram to make a dramatic break with a past that was riddled with paganism.

Abram was leaving behind his old identity; he became a man without a country, a wanderer.

And he did so without knowing where he was going. God just told him to get up and go. He promised to show him where he was going, but only once he arrived.

However, God promised to bless Abram.

Genesis 12 starts one of the most important sections of the Old Testament.

In some ways, we could think of Genesis 1-11 as an introduction to Genesis 12 and following.

And in some ways we can think of much of the Old Testament as working out and adding detail to what happens in Genesis 12 and the rest of the material about Abram.

Because in Genesis 12 and the next few chapters, God made a covenant relationship with Abram who came to be called Abraham. That covenant relationship undergirds the rest of the Old Testament, and the most important elements are all right here.

What God said to Abraham can be divided into seven clauses.

In the first three clauses, God promises to make Abram -- who had left his own nation -- into a brand-new nation among all the nations of earth. Abram wouldn't come from the nations that were infected with sin and paganism. He would be something new, a nation made by God. God promised to bless Abram and to make Abram's name great (a promise usually reserved for kings and God himself.)

In clauses five and six, God promised to bless those who blessed Abram and his descendants, and to curse those who curse them.

Then in clause 7, God made the most astounding promise. He said that through Abram, all the nations on earth (in fact, all the families of human beings on earth) would be blessed. This was a promise from God that through Abram and the great nation of which he would become father, God would save the world. We know this promise is fulfilled in Jesus. In Jesus all the people of the world are blessed. That shows how important this passage is.

In the middle, God pushed Abram to share blessings with the world.

Clauses 1-3 and 5-7 are filled with examples of God pouring blessings out on Abram, his descendants, and all the families of all the people on earth.

But in clause 4 God says that Abram is being blessed so that he will be a blessing.

What does that mean?

The Old Testament assumed that we would be ambassadors.

Genesis chapter 12 still occurs as time is comparatively new.

The world was still adjusting to the fact that sin had entered the world.

God was just beginning to reveal his plan to save the world through Jesus, a son of Israel and a son of Abraham.

We could go back to Genesis 1 and see that this principle is there as well.

We could look at a few points in between and see that the principle is there, too.

But when we look at Abram, we really see that there is no time in our memory when we were not ambassadors! God's people have always been ambassadors! We were and are blessed! And God's blessing begs to be shared! The New Testament tells us the same thing:

RECONCILIATION REQUIRES THAT WE SHARE.

2 Corinthians 5:17 starts with the word "therefore" that makes us ask the question, "What is the 'therefore' there for?" It's pointing us to what came before, the context.

In the case of 2 Corinthians 5:17, the context includes the relationship between Paul the Apostle and the church in Corinth.

Paul's relationship with the church in Corinth had been tense.

He had exerted some authority over them in the past, and they had responded to his authority and addressed issues Paul had raised with them.

But after that time, it seems, opponents of Paul made their way into the church.

Paul sent emissaries who had addressed the problems, and the relationship was headed back in a positive direction again. However, there were many lingering questions about Paul.

There were so many questions that the book of 2 Corinthians is filled with Paul's unusually candid and biographical defense of his role as an apostle.

In fact, the first part of 2 Corinthians chapter 5 includes an explanation from Paul about why he was so passionate about his own ministry.

Paul argued that he would rather be at home in heaven in a heavenly body with his heavenly Father. However, serving people like those in Corinth and sharing the Good News about Jesus meant that he needed to keep going for a little while longer.

Indeed, now that Jesus has died for us, that ought to motivate us.

Now those of us who know that Jesus died for us are now controlled by Jesus and are doing his will (sharing the Good News about him).

That's powerful stuff. If Jesus died for us, then we belong to him. We do what he says.

In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul says that the transformation is absolute.

Therefore [there it is], if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

So we're talking now about followers of Jesus. Christ died for us. Not only that, but we have recognized and accepted the fact that Christ died for us. We belong to him.

So what has happened? Paul says that we have become new creations. What we were (the old) has passed away or gone; it's over just like Abram's life in the pagan lands of Ur and Haran. In its place is the new life that we have in Jesus, and that life is pointed toward a new home. This time it's not Canaan but the Kingdom of God and our heavenly home in the future.

This transformation is absolute in ways that are absolutely beautiful, but you may not see it.

When Paul says that the old has passed away, he uses a tense in the original Greek that means, "It has certainly happened. The old passed away in the past. That is over and done with, never to come back and never to be revisited."

But when he says that the new has come, he says it in a tense in Greek that means that it started in the past but is continuing into the present and is as present, meaningful, relevant, and true in the present as it was in the past.

That's certain. The old has gone. The new is here, and the new isn't going away.

Why? In 2 Corinthians 5:18, 19, and 21, we find that who we are is based on the work of Jesus.

First, Paul speaks about the way that we were reconciled to God.

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5:18-19)

God the Father reconciled us to himself through Jesus.

That means that God the Son's mission on earth was partly to ensure that human sin or trespasses were no longer counted against us. In other words, the sins and trespasses that we committed, that we were responsible for, that we owned, we would no longer own.

But how was that reconciliation accomplished? I know it's a little artificial to jump down past verse 20 right now, but let's look at it very quickly, because in it Paul tells us how our reconciliation happened:

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Jesus (God the Son) is the one who knew no sin. God the Father took the sin that rightfully belonged to us, along with the penalty that our sin carried, and transferred it to Jesus. He put it on Jesus.

Now that we no longer have that sin attached to us, God the Father took the righteousness that Jesus had, and the righteousness that Jesus added by paying the price for our sin, and transferred that righteousness to us. Is that not amazing?

Then Paul drops another "therefore" in 2 Corinthians 5:20:

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

Now that ministry of reconciliation that Jesus had been doing is given to us.

Now we are Jesus' ambassadors, who have the job of telling people what has happened to us.

We must share! But how could we not share!?!

WILL WE SHARE?

I think it's important that we tell the truth that this new normal makes us a little bit afraid.

Let's tell the truth. Some of us are afraid of getting sick.

Worse, some of us are afraid that someone we love is going to get sick and die. (Why? Because that has happened to some of us and to too many people.)

We're afraid of running out of things, which is why we've stocked up at different times on paper goods, food, water, milk, and gas.

These days some of us are getting afraid of losing some of our freedoms.

And at the same time, some of us are getting afraid of people whose risks make us feel unsafe.

At times, we're afraid of being around people.

At other times, we're afraid of being alone.

As things go on, we're a little bit afraid that this won't ever end.

Our fears can lead us to "Three Deadly Sins of the New Normal" that keep us from sharing:

- **Pride: Me.** "I am more concerned about myself." This deadly sin that causes us to hoard right now. When we feel like our survival is threatened, then we hoard things. Which is how my little family unintentionally became the owners of four- or five-pound bags of rice.
- **Greed: Me and mine.** "I am more concerned with my people." Because we feel threatened by the virus and by this season, we feel a need to protect the things and the people we hold dear. We are concerned with the survival of our family and those who are closest to us. It makes us protective and far less likely to be generous.
- **Wrath: Me, not you.** "I am afraid of you and people like you." We're going to this place, because we're afraid and stressed out and less patient. So our wrath starts to come out. We blame people and get angry and frustrated. Pretty soon, we give up on people and figure that they aren't worth the effort and they aren't really worth the Good News we have to share.

What's the end result? The end result is that we have a tendency right now to keep good things for ourselves, and we are far less likely to share anything (including the Good News about Jesus) with people right now.

But some things cannot be contained.

If you've ever read comic books or watched comic-book movies, you know that comic-book prisons can never hold comic-book villains. Every time the good guys in comic books catch the bad guys, they send them off to super-maximum prisons where they are supposed to stay safely

behind bars and away from the people they want to harm. But no prison has ever been able to hold basically any comic-book villain. At the start of the next episode, they always break out. Some things can't be contained.

The life of Abram reminds us that blessing can't be contained. God blessed Abram for a purpose, so that he could bless all of us. Some things can't be contained.

Paul reminds us that the Gospel, the Good News about Jesus, is meant to be shared. We have been reconciled to God; now we are ambassadors of reconciliation. God is making his appeal to the world through us. God is calling the world to be reconciled, and he is using our voices. Some things can't be contained! Some things must not be contained!

Will we share?

That's the question we face today.

The overwhelming call of the Bible is for us to share with others the blessings that God has given us, and the Good News that God has put inside of us.

The new normal pulls us to hoard every good thing and to mistrust everyone else.

But we are ambassadors of reconciliation. Will we share? The choice is ours.