**YOU WILL BE A SOURCE OF BLESSING**

January 6, 2019

Genesis 12:1-3

Key verse 12:2 “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.”

Happy New year! May God bless you in the new year 2019. As we start a new year 2019, we want to think about how we can be a source of blessing in the new year. In English Bible, it is translated as “You will be a blessing.” But in Korean Bible, it is translated as “You will be a source of blessing.” To me, “You will be a source of blessing” has a deeper meaning than “you will be a blessing.” One person can start a chain reaction which lasts eternity. “It is a wonderful life” is one of the greatest movies of all time. On Christmas Eve 1945, George Bailey considers suicide because of his business problem: He is about to lose everything. George wished that he had never been born. Then an angel showed him what the world would be like if George had never been born. When George was 12 years old, he saves his younger brother Harry from drowning at a frozen lake. Then Harry joined an army and became a pilot in World War II. Harry shot down a kamikaze plane to prevent it from bombing a transport ship, and all the soldiers on the transport ship were saved. If George had never been born, all those soldiers would have died. Also at his after-school job, George realizes that the pharmacist, Mr. Gower, distraught over his son’s death from the flu, has accidentally added poison to a child’s prescription, and intervenes to stop him from causing harm. If George had not intervened, the child would have been killed, and Mr. Gower would have imprisoned for manslaughter. This shows how one person saved many, and made a big difference in life. George became a source of blessing to so many people even though he was not aware of it.

The first eleven chapters of Genesis tell us that God created a good and beautiful world and put man in it to be the ruler, and caretaker of all things. God was pleased and man was happy (Ge 1,2). Then man and woman disobeyed God and sin entered the world (3). At first, disobeying God seemed to be a very trivial matter. They just ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But it was not a trivial matter. Because of sin, man lost paradise. Because of sin, death came; men were alienated from God and from each other. Cain killed his brother; then, he lived in fear. He became a restless wanderer who produced only bad fruit. As time went on, things did not get better—they got worse. Men deliberately left God out of their lives—especially out of their marriages—and became corrupt and violent (6). The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth and his heart was full of pain. So God judged the world and destroyed it with a flood. But this did not solve the sin problem (8:21). Even Noah, the one righteous man whom God saved out of the flood had sin in his heart. He offered a blood sacrifice to God, and God accepted it. God then made a plan to deal with sin in another way.

Beginning in Genesis 12 God called one man, Abram, and gave him a covenant promise. Abram believed God and obeyed his word. God promised to make him a source of blessing for all people. God’s best blessing is salvation from sin and inheriting his kingdom. Paul said that Abraham is our father if we walk in his footsteps of faith. (Ro 4:12) He also said that those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham the man of faith. Galatians 3:14 says, “God redeemed us so that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus...” As Abraham became a source of blessing when he responded to God’s call, we too can be a source of blessing when we respond to God’s call.

When God called Abram, he was 75 years old and his wife Sarai was 65. Abram and his 2 brothers, Haran and Nahor, were born and raised in Ur of the Chaldeans. Haran, the father of Lot, died there. This was ancient Babylonia, a region noted for astrologers and all kinds of idol worship. They say that there were more than 3000 idols at that time. Abram’s family was also idol worshippers. (Jos 24:2)

God first called Abram to leave his country and his people when he was living in Ur. (Acts 7:2,3) At that time, Abram’s father, Terah, took his 2 surviving sons and his grandson Lot and left for Canaan. But when he got to Haran, he decided to settle there. Abram was wealthy, but he had one great personal problem. His wife Sarai was barren, so he had no children. These days no one cares about not having children. But to a man with a sense of history, this is tragic, for it meant that he had no one to whom he could pass his name and wealth, and his spiritual heritage. His line would end with himself. He may have found some comfort in his nephew Lot, whom he looked upon as a son, but there was still a fatalistic element and a deep sorrow in his heart.

Look at verses 1-3. “The Lord had said to Abram, ‘Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. 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. I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.’” This call contains a command and a promise. The command is, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.” Abram was an old man, 75 years old. For such a man to leave the security of his homeland, his family and friends—to cut these precious ties and go into an unknown world, was indeed difficult. Young people might not have such a problem, leaving their families. Actually many teenagers eagerly want to leave their parents for college to enjoy freedom. But for old men like Abram, it is very difficult. Learning a foreign language at an old age is not easy. Learning a new custom is not easy. But God wanted Abram to leave his family. God wanted him to become independent of his idolatrous family. He wanted him to be the pioneer of a new history. He wanted him to depend on God alone—not on family, friends, or on past experience or his habitual ways of thinking and acting.

When we begin the life of faith, we must break away from our past lives. Family, home, my own country are not necessarily bad. But when we depend on these human things, we cannot wholly trust and obey God. For some people, to go from our own country and our father’s house is a spiritual decision which results in a new and better relationship with our human families. We become independent by becoming dependent on God. For others, it means actually leaving physically, breaking human ties. In every case, the earthly things which we once trusted and to which we once clung for security and help must be surrendered when we begin a new life in God. When our hearts and feet are deeply caught in the sinful world, God calls us to repent and leave a life of sin and turn to God.

God did not call Abram in order to make life miserable for him. God said to Abram, “I will bless you and you will be a blessing.” “I will make you into a great nation.” “I will make your name great.” God called Abram to bless him. God’s blessing is a covenant promise, for God is a God of promise. When we become Christians, we take hold of God’s promise and enter into a covenant relationship with God. God promised Abram—in spite of his childlessness—to make him a great nation. This means that Abram would have many descendants so that they would form a nation. He promised to make Abram’s name great. A great name implies honor. Abram would be honored and respected by all men. Abraham Lincoln was named after Abraham. Greatness does not mean popular. Michael Jackson is popular. But nobody thinks he is great. God would make Abram great.

But the greatest blessing that God can give a man is to make him a source of blessing to others. God promised Abram that he would be a blessing—that all peoples on earth would be blessed because of him. He would not live and die as a useless old man whose family line would end with himself. Through him and his descendants God would pour out the greatest blessing God can give. God’s promise to make Abram a source of blessing for all mankind was finally fulfilled in Jesus, whom God sent to die for our sins and be raised to life so that all who believe in him might be saved from sin and destruction. Abraham became a father to Isaac, and Isaac became a father to Jacob, and from Jacob, God made the nation Israel, and Jesus Christ came out of the nation Israel. So this promise has always been understood to be the Messianic promise. Peter said in Acts 3:25,26, “And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, ‘Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.’ When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.”

God calls us into a covenant relationship with himself in order to bless us and make us a blessing. “Blessing” in original Hebrew means “expand.” That is why in the past fat people were considered blessed. In the original language, Abram being a blessing means that he will expand until he fills the whole world. It means that he will influence the whole world. Likewise, each of us can become a source of blessing to others when we accept God’s salvation and his calling to participate in his redemptive work in our own times by sharing his gospel and his word and his love with the people of our own time. If we hold our faith and blessing for ourselves alone or for our own families or people, then something is fundamentally wrong. Such believers among the Jews were the ones who nailed Jesus to the cross. When our faith is based on God’s covenant, not only are we blessed, but we become a source of blessing for our families, our neighbors and for the world.

Jonathan Edwards was one of the most respected preachers in 1700s. He attended Yale University at the age of thirteen and later went on to become the president of Princeton college. He married his wife Sarah in 1727 and they were blessed with eleven children. Every night when Mr. Edwards was home, he would spend an hour conversing with his family and then praying a blessing over each child. Jonathan and his wife Sarah passed on a great, godly legacy to their eleven children. An American educator, A.E. Winship decided to trace the descendants of Jonathan Edwards almost 150 years after his death. His findings are remarkable, especially when compared to another man from the same time period known as Max Juke.

Jonathan Edwards’ legacy includes: 1 U.S. Vice-President (Aaron Burr), 1 Dean of a law school, 1 dean of a medical school, 3 U.S. Senators, 3 governors, 3 mayors, 13 college presidents, 30 judges, 60 doctors, 65 professors, 75 Military officers, 80 public office holders, 100 lawyers, 100 clergymen, and 285 college graduates. How may this be explained? Edwards was a godly man, but he was also hard working, intelligent and moral. Furthermore, Winship states, “Much of the capacity and talent, intensity and character of the more than 1,400 of Edwards’ family is due to Mrs. Edwards.”

Max Juke’s legacy came to people’s attention when the family trees of 42 different men in the New York prison system were traced back to him. He lived in New York at about the same period as Edwards. The Jukes family originally was studied by sociologist Richard L. Dugdale in 1877. Jukes’ descendants included: 7 murderers, 60 thieves, 190 prostitutes, 150 other convicts, 310 welfare recipients, and 440 who were physically wrecked by addiction to alcohol. Of the 1,200 descendants that were studied, 300 died prematurely. According to the March 8, 1902, issue of The School Journal, “The almost universal traits of the ‘Jukes’ were idleness, ignorance and vulgarity. These characteristics led to disease and disgrace, to dependency on welfare and crime.” When the Edwards and Jukes families are put side by side for comparison, the difference is obvious. It is like day and night. One person makes a big difference; either he can be a blessing, or a curse.

Mother Theresa said, “Not all of us can do great things; but we can do small things with great love.” One small act of great love creates a chain reaction and will have everlasting consequences. I cannot do much. I cannot change anybody. I cannot solve anyone’s problem. All I can do is to pray. 1 Samuel 12:23 says, “As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right.” I want to be a source of blessing by praying for each of our members and by teaching them the Bible. I pray that we all may be a source of blessing in the new year 2019.