

LEGACY OF A GREAT FATHER

Genesis 12: 1-3; 18:19

They thought they had seen it all, but two years ago policemen in Caseville, MI had a once in a lifetime experience. 911 dispatchers received calls one morning about an underage driver that was a potential danger. Here's what one caller said, "Uh, yes, I'm on Kinde Road....and believe it or not, I just passed about a 5-6 year-old kid flying down the road with a red Pontiac Sunbird". But the caller misjudged the age, the kid turned out to be 7. But this 7 year old boy had somehow gotten the keys to his stepdad's Sunbird and was on a thrill ride that no roller coaster could ever touch. He went through downtown Caseville swerving close to curbs while pedestrians walked by. When he got out of town he hit speeds of up to 65 or 70 mph.

Well, after 20 miles of breathtaking suspense and the chief of police tailing him as close as possible, the boy finally stopped on the side of the road. The chief hopped out to apprehend the reckless driver, but the boy's car door was locked, with the car still in gear and running. But the chief was able to calm the boy down and the boy finally got his door unlocked, and the drama was over. And here's how the chief described the scene at that point: "He was crying and just kept saying he wanted to go to his dad's. That was pretty much it: He just wanted to go to his dad's".

Friends, countless books have been written and countless sermons have been preached about the importance of fatherhood. Countless lectures have been delivered, and even one movie recently made. But none could tell it any better than a pitiful little seven year old Michigan boy, raised in a broken home, homesick for his dad, doing anything it took to get to him.

Today I want to preach another one of those sermons on fatherhood. I want every father who is here today to leave a legacy of being a great father or even a great grandfather. For men, I promise you, whatever you do in this life, nothing is as important. If you are a dad nothing is as important as passing down the torch of faith to your children, that they may glorify Jesus Christ in their lives and pass their faith down to their own children. And if there's anything that the church of Jesus Christ needs, and if there's anything that the nation needs today, it is a mighty army of godly dads who will rise up and be the fathers that God has called them to be. But it won't happen just because you bring your kids to church on Sundays. It won't happen just because you say a blessing over the food at mealtime. It will happen as you follow God's pattern for fatherhood as He has given it to you in His holy Word. So let's see what that pattern is.

Turn in your Bibles, please, to Genesis 12:1-3. There is no better example of what it takes for a father to leave a godly legacy than Abraham. It is interesting that Abraham is the only Old Testament type of God the Father. There are numerous types of Jesus in the Old Testament. Adam, Isaac, Moses, David, Isaiah, and Jonah are all types of Christ. But Abraham is the only type of the Father.

Abraham is also called the father of the Hebrew race numerous times in scripture. In Romans 4:16 Paul still calls Abraham the father of us all, because all men, Jew and Gentile alike, are saved by faith in Christ, just like Abraham was saved by faith in a future Messiah. And though it is not true, the Muslims claim Abraham as the father of their faith. So Abraham is considered the father of three major religious groups, and you are talking about around 2/3rds of the people in the entire world. Abraham. And Bible teacher J. Vernon McGee pointed out a number of years ago that more people worldwide revere Abraham

than perhaps any other Biblical character. So Abraham is certainly in the position to be an example of godly father, and he was a good example indeed.

But I want us to consider Abraham from a different angle this morning. I want us to not look so much as to what Abraham did to become a good father, but what God did to make him a good father. And I want us to see that God will work in the life of any dad to do the same thing if that dad is willing. Look back with me, please to Gen. 12:1. The first thing that we see that God did for Abraham was to give him a **great prescript**. God said, "Abraham, get out of your country. You and Sarah move to a place where I will show you". And when God spoke, Abraham obeyed. But when he first heard God's orders he probably didn't think they were so great. Because you see, God had already commanded Abraham to move once before (Acts 7: 2, 3), when he lived in Mesopotamia. He had already moved 550 miles to Haran with Sarah, his father Terah, and nephew Lot (Gen. 11:31). That's a long way traveling by foot. We do not know how long they had been in Haran, but Abraham was middle age by now and would no doubt like to be putting down some roots. But God told him to up and move again.

But secondly, God told Abraham to leave all of his family behind. Leave everyone except your wife and Lot and his family. Say goodbye and perhaps never see them again. And thirdly, when Abraham arrived in Canaan, he never had a home of his own again. For the next 100 years, till the day he died, Abraham lived in a flimsy, flapping tent. Never settling down, never building relationships with the Canaanites, forever a vagabond.

So what's the point behind this great prescript? Just this. Abraham was about to become the father of God's chosen people, the people that God would sanctify, the people He would make holy. They would be the people who would bear the light of God

before a heathen world, showing them the way to God. They were the people through whom the Messiah, the Savior of the world would come. That's who Abraham's family would be. **But they could not be a holy people with Abraham's extended family around.** For Abraham's brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, and even his own father Terah were all idol worshippers. And God knew that His chosen people had to come out and be separate from those who would hinder them from fulfilling their calling. And once he got to Canaan, he knew that he could not become attached to the customs of the Canaanites, either. They were idol worshippers just like his family. And they would draw his family away from Jehovah just like his own extended family would do. And to keep himself and his family faithful to their calling he kept them constantly on the move.

Men, if you would be the godly father that God has called you to be, the first thing that He will call you to do is to call your family out of the culture of Canaan. To come out of this world that is dominated by the devil, that is saturated with sin, and that sneers at the statues of God. You see, this world is not our home, anyway. Paul says that our citizenship is in Heaven, from which we eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (Phil. 3:20). And we're waiting for Him to come and sweep us up and out of this old sinful world and take us home. That's what Abraham was doing. That's the reason that he didn't settle down in Canaan. That's the reason he was a restless sojourner the entire time he was there. The writer of Hebrews says that Abraham dwelt in Canaan as in a foreign country, living in tents, because he looked for a city whose builder and maker was God (Heb. 11:9-10).

Fathers, let me tell you, life cannot be business as usual with great dads! And God is calling you to live your life as Abraham and to instill this lifestyle into your family. So don't fall in love with the ways of Canaan, for you are just passing through to a place

that makes Canaan look like a garbage dump. But rather, keep your eyes on Jesus and on keep your eyes on Heaven and live your life laying up your treasures there! But let me tell you, it won't be easy. Because the tentacles of the world just may have wrapped around you as well as your family. And their grip is tight.

All of us have been amazed at the free fall of our Judeo-Christian values in the last few years. Surveys now indicate that a majority of Americans see nothing wrong with homosexual relationships. Recently an older preacher friend of mine told me that in his lifetime he's seen homosexuality go from being castigated to being tolerated to being accepted to being embraced to being celebrated. And it is absolutely heartbreaking at how many professing Christians are living together without being married. Just like Thomas Jefferson once cut out parts of the Bible he didn't like, they have ripped out the seventh commandment, which says you shall not commit adultery. Those in America who claim no religious preference is now 20%, doubled from 1990. And no religious preference means no religion. Paul writes to Timothy that in the last days men will be lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God (2 Tim. 3:4). And inside and outside of the church, pleasure mongering is the order of the day.

So fathers, if there's ever been a time to man up and stand up against such as these in your home, it is now!! Now is the time to regulate what your children watch on television and listen to on their I-pods. Now is the time to monitor their internet activity. Now is the time to make serving Christ and not pleasure your family's priority. But now is the time to do something else. Now is the time to start spending time with your kids, and pouring positive things into their lives. Paul Tsongas once said, "No one on his deathbed ever said, "I wish I had spent more time on my business". Notice what Abraham did Gen.12:6-8; 13: 3-4, 18. Everywhere Abraham went in Canaan he built an altar and worshipped. And you can be

sure that he did not worship alone. He had Sarah, Lot and his family and his servants right there with him. Fathers, God is saying to all of us today, “Fight for the souls of your family!” Don’t leave it up to mom. Because as good as job as mom can do, she can’t do your job as well as you can.

So God gave Abraham a **great prescript**. Get out of your country and live a life separated unto Me. But our text also says that God gave him some **great promises**. Look at Gen. 12:2-3 (read). Now, we must understand that in ways these promises are unique to Abraham. God blessed Abraham with great wealth, and all of us have not received such blessings. And as the father of the Jewish nation he had one blessing that no other man will ever have. For none but Abraham could say that in me all the families of the earth will be blessed. But every Christian father alive can look to v. 2 and pray that God would bless him with the same blessings. I want us to look at each one of God’s promises to Abraham for just for a few moments.

God told Abraham that He would make Abraham a great nation, that is, he would give Abraham a great posterity. And God certainly made good on His word. For around about 900 years later the nation of Israel became the most powerful nation on earth and the nation blessed by God more than any other. And fathers, when you will decide to make the kingdom of Heaven the highest goal for you and your family, you can be sure that God will be working to make you a great nation, to give you a great family, not necessarily in size, but in character.

Most of us know Proverbs 22:6, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it”. Now, some children obviously don’t turn out the way we want them to. Their parents are godly and they do their very best to raise their children to honor Christ, but their kids have a mind of their own and they go their own way. That’s because Proverbs 22:6 is a

principle, not an iron-clad promise. But dads, if you will walk the walk of a godly man, love you children as Jesus loves you, and call them to follow after Christ with you, the possibilities are great that you will raise a great family. They will live peaceful, Christ-honoring lives, and they will bring honor to you as well. Proverbs 10:1 says, “A wise son makes a glad father...” John wrote in his third epistle, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (3 John 4). Now, John was talking about his spiritual children, but what he said is certainly true for natural children as well. Godly children bring great joy! And dads, what greater blessing is there than that?

And that brings us to the second promise that God gave Abraham. “I will bless you”. Sir, your son might grow up to be the president, but for him to walk fully and completely in the ways of Jesus Christ is a far greater blessing and a far greater reason to rejoice. So dads, I throw out this question to you today. What pleases you most about your children? What is it about them that draws out your highest praises? Is it because he is a good athlete, or that she wins the beauty walks, or that she made the scholars bowl team, or that you just know he’s going to be the next Vince Gill? Oh, I beg you, fathers, don’t bring harm upon your children because you push them to excel in things that will one day mean nothing to the neglect of the things that mean everything!

Now look at the third blessing that God gave Abraham for leaving his country and family to follow Him. He said in verse 2, “...I will bless you and make your name great”. Who would not want to have a great name? You may say, “Well, I don’t have any aspirations for greatness”. But the truth is, you should desire to be just as great as God wants you to be for the glory of His name. What a testimony God gives to great Christian athletes such as Tim Tebow or actors like Kurt Cameron or businessmen like

Chick-Fil-A founder Truett Cathy. And every man should seek to excel in whatever he does that he, too, might have a great name in his small world for the glory of God. But dads, the one area of life that you should strive for greatness the most is in the eyes of your wife and children. And God will make you great in the eyes of your family if you forsake all and seek to follow Him with all of your heart.

My closest friend in the ministry is Tommy Smothers. About two years ago Tommy celebrated his 25th anniversary at the church he pastors in Priceville and invited me to come up and preach that morning and help him and his family celebrate. Tommy has two children, twin boys, who were there with their families that day. During the recognition service there was a testimony time, and one of Tommy's boys got up and began to talk about his dad. Now, Tommy is not a high profile pastor. He pastors a small, country church. All who know Tommy have the highest regards for him, but there are many more pastors who are much more well known than Tommy. But there could have never been a more honorable tribute to a man than when Tommy's son began to speak of his dad. That boy told of what a wonderful daddy Tommy had been, and as he talked he began to weep, and others began to weep with him. And I sat there thinking, "This is what it's all about! This is what success is all about." And for Tommy it hasn't been about preaching in big churches and winning awards at the Southern Baptist Convention. It's been about what really matters, having a great name in the eyes of his children. Leaving a great legacy as a father. Proverbs 17:6 says, "...the glory of children is their fathers". One translation puts it, "The pride of sons is their fathers". I tell you, dads, there is no greater blessing in this life than to be great in the eyes of your children.

And that brings us to the last blessing that God promised Abraham. The last phrase of verse 2 says, “You shall be a blessing”. Oh, beloved, it is a blessing just to be a blessing! No one in history was more of a blessing to others than Jesus, and no one ever had as much joy. And the Hebrew verb of the phrase “you shall be a blessing” is actually an imperative, and is more correctly translated, “Be a blessing” (Leupold, *Genesis, in loc*). And so let me give you the Griffin paraphrase of what God is saying to Abraham here. He’s saying, “Abraham, when you leave your country and your kinsmen for Me I’m going to bless your sandals off. I’m going to make you a great nation, I’m going to bless you materially, and I’m going to give you a great name in all the surrounding territory. Now go out and be a blessing”.

I read a story yesterday about a dad who had a chance to be a real blessing, but his selfishness blew the opportunity. This man had recently separated from his wife, and one day he received a text message from his son who was in college. This boy had just gotten a date with the prettiest girl in his school, but had no money to take her out. So the text simply said, “Have date. Send money”. Well, he got an immediate reply from his dad that said, “Have money. Send date”.

Dads, your goal in this earthly life should be to be a blessing. “Lord, let me be a blessing to my family. Let me be a blessing to everyone who knows me”. And this should be the goal of every Christian, dad, mom, no children, young, old – everyone. “Lord, let me be a blessing”.

Well, God gave Abraham a great **prescript**, and He gave him some great **promises**, but He gave Abraham one more thing that God did to make him a good father. And that is, He gave Abraham a **great privilege**. Look at. Gen. 18:19. Now, the English in this verse does not do justice to the Hebrew. When God said, “I have known him”, the original meaning is more than

just a casual knowledge. The thrust is, “I have known him intimately”, or I have known him as an intimate friend. When God called Abraham out of his country to make him a great nation, He called him into the most awesome, unspeakably glorious relationship on the face of the earth. Friendship with Himself.

Think about something for a few moments. There have been numerous people in Scripture who have had very close walks with God. Adam and Eve walked with God in the Garden of Eden. How close they must have been to Him. Enoch walked so closely with God that on one of their walks one day Enoch just walked with God right on up to Heaven. David, the sweet psalmist of Israel, surely was close to God to be able to write, “In your presence is fullness of joy, at your right hand are pleasures forever more” (Ps. 16:11). Moses writes that God talked with him face to face as He would talk with a friend (Ex. 33:11). That is a mystery we just don’t understand, because no man can see God’s face and live (Ex. 33:20). But of all of the biblical giants who walked with God, all of these, plus Noah, Daniel, Job, John the Baptist, Paul – all of them – Abraham is the only one about whom God said, “He’s My friend”. Three times in Scripture Abraham is called the friend of God (2 Chron. 20:7; Is. 41:8; James 2:23).

Oh, there has never been a man who ever lived who was more privileged than Abraham! God came down and said, “Abraham, I’m calling you out to be different from this world. But more than that, I want you to be My intimate friend”.

Someone once said, “Life should be one long talk between God and us”. Dads, that’s the relationship that God desires to have with each one of you. But know this! It is only a means to an end. Look at the verse again. “For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they kept the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice...”