

# Blessed

## Part 1, Genesis 12:1-3, Galatians 3:1-14

<sup>1</sup> *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.*

<sup>2</sup> *"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.*

<sup>3</sup> *I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."* (Genesis 12:1-3)

<sup>1</sup> *You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified.*

<sup>2</sup> *I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?*

<sup>3</sup> *Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?*

<sup>4</sup> *Have you suffered so much for nothing--if it really was for nothing?*

<sup>5</sup> *Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?*

<sup>6</sup> *Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."*

<sup>7</sup> *Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham.*

<sup>8</sup> *The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you."*

<sup>9</sup> *So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.*

<sup>10</sup> *All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."*

<sup>11</sup> *Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith."*

<sup>12</sup> *The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them."*

<sup>13</sup> *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."*

<sup>14</sup> *He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. (Galatians 3:1-14)*

I regularly hear people describing their life as blessed. What do they mean when they say that? What do we mean when we say that? What is blessing? How does it work and how do you become the recipient of blessing? At Christmas we celebrate the birth of the one in whom all the blessings of God are made clear and made available. In his introduction to the life of Jesus, John talks about Jesus who:

*From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another.*  
(John 1:16)

Paul echoes this thought when he describes:

*...our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. (Ephesians 1:3)*

So leading up to Christmas we thought it might be a good idea to find out what this blessing thing was all about.

When you do a word study on bless the first thing you notice is that the word is a little vague and more than a little mysterious. In the Hebrew bible the most common example of Bless is "*barak*" and it is a word that means literally; to declare, which doesn't sound like much of anything until you remember that when God declares, when God speaks, amazing things begin to happen.

*And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. (Genesis 1:3)*

When God "*Barak's*", when God blesses, this means that something is transferred in the relationship between God and the world, he speaks light and as a result, we experience light, which is a different meaning to the other Hebrew word for bless; "*ashere*" which refers more to the impact of God's blessing on human beings, specifically our happiness. Which is the same for the most common form of blessing in the New Testament; *makarios* which means happy or blissful.

*Makarios* was associated with the Island of Cyprus "the happy isle." It was thought that because of its geographical location, its perfect climate, and fertile soil, that anyone who lived on Cyprus just had to be happy. So when Jesus says that people are blessed, one of the things he is saying is that you are in a good place.

A second Greek word *Eulogeo*, from which we get out English word eulogy, talks about the kind of blessing that comes about when really encouraging things are said about you. It also describes the blessing that we say over our food (Matthew 26:26).

The real fun and games happen when you start to look closely into the English word bless because it's not a great match for the original Hebrew and Greek words and illustrates why bible translation is sometimes very difficult. The English word bless comes from an old English word *bletsian* or *bledsian*, and its meaning was to consecrate or make holy. It had this meaning because it originally came from an old Germanic word *Blotham*, (blood) which referred to blood sprinkled on pagan alters. Now that's a little unsettling – but even more unsettling is that when the word bless was chosen it brought with it a level of meaning that was not strongly represented by the biblical text. Even today that kind of meaning still hangs around the word bless. "*Bless me father for I have sinned*" is a familiar statement made by those seeking to deal with sins and grow in holiness through confession to a priest. The problem is that this is not really what the bible means by bless. When God's blessing first occurs it has nothing to do with what priests do or with holiness before God. For example Let's have a look at the very first time the bible uses the word:

*God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth." (Genesis 1:22)*

So in the very beginning God's blessing speaks of the transmission of life from the living God to creatures who now share in that life.

Now in our modern minds there is a voice that pops up at this point, objecting to this idea and screeching that life comes from evolution not from God. This is an incredibly complicated matter and I don't have time to deal with it here but, if you are interested in the question of the origins of life, come and talk to me, I believe the evidence that God is the source of all life, or as the psalms say, is the fountain of life (Psalm 36:9) is quite compelling.

I believe that evolution is simply a characteristic of life and not in any way the cause. When Darwin recognised that there were powerful mechanisms in living things that caused incredible change and adaptation, he was completely right, but he was not investigating cause he was investigating effect.

We now know that what causes life to be so incredibly adaptive and dynamic are the incredible biological codes which underlie all living things in DNA. If the information in your DNA were put into a book, the volumes placed on top of each other would reach 70 metres high. The latest calculations have revealed that this huge book would contain some 3 billion different "subjects". Without this vast amount of coded information, life is impossible, evolution would certainly be impossible and how can that be? This DNA is a piece of flesh that is a hundred thousand times smaller than a millimetre, simply made up of protein, fat and water molecules. It is a miracle of astounding proportions that this infinitesimal piece of flesh should contain and store even a single bit of information-let alone millions of bits that we now know make everything work and without which nothing works. So the big million dollar question is where did this code come from? And the answer of course is simple and intrinsic to the nature of codes themselves, that without exception all codes are created by intelligent beings.

There are a thousand things that could be said on this subject but we really need to move on.

Which may give us some insight into why the story of God is also the story of healing, of the restoration of life. But there is a second dimension to God's blessing and this comes into focus as the story shifts to human beings.

*God blessed them (human beings) and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."*  
(Genesis 1:28)

So God blesses human beings with life in the same way that he blesses animals but additionally he gives human beings a job – to subdue and rule. So to be blessed is not only about the miraculous beat of our heart, but it is also the expression of God's life of purpose within us, which means that God's blessing is both physical and spiritual. This is how the bible begins, with the story of the God who blesses, who gives his own life to his creation and it begins this way because this is the first thing

that God wants us to know. He wants us to know him as the God of life, the God of blessing.

I think God wants to plant that thought in our minds because in the next couple of chapters God is going to come off as a little grumpy, with the punishing and the smiting and so forth, and God does not want us to forget that the game plan is to bless. So how do we make sense of grumpy God in the story of blessing?

Well - when I was kid we lived next door to a policeman, Constable Roberts. One day we were shopping at the local grocery store and I saw Constable Roberts charging through the door of the shop looking really angry, which was very unusual as he was generally a calm and good humoured fellow. It turned out that he was looking for the owner of a car parked out the front in which two small children were locked inside with the windows closed on a hot day. Seeing those children in danger had transformed Constable Roberts into an angry policeman because the world needed an angry policeman to rescue some children who were in danger. In the same way God needs to become angry God in order to save his human children from being cut off from the life of God, cut off eternally. What would you think of a policeman who saw those children, and smiled and did nothing? Are we only interested in a God who simply smiles and is nice but fails to save people from destruction and death?

But when you read all of God's story you realise God always wants to bless us, but we can, and we often do, reject his blessings, we have that choice.

The Garden of Eden is the story of two trees and a choice. What is the first tree called? The tree of life, life with God in the shelter of his branches and then there is the tree of knowledge, representing independent existence (Genesis 2:9) and then there was the choice and they chose the tree of knowledge and then everything went wrong. You know that was my story. When I left school I deliberately chose to walk away from the tree of life. I had known God, I had known his life in my life, but I wanted to live like my mates, I wanted to make money, I wanted a motor bike, and I wanted to drink and have sex whenever I wanted to, so I walked away from the tree of life and everything went wrong. Not outwardly, I did actually achieve most of my goals, but inwardly I was really struggling, my life had become pale and insipid and life-less, I was struggling with depression it was like living under a curse. Which it was, because to live away from the life of God is to live under a curse. When God established his covenant with Israel this is precisely the choice he put before them.

*<sup>19</sup> This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses.*

Just pause for a moment and notice that in those linked phrases Life means blessing, and death means curse

*Now choose life, so that you and your children may live <sup>20</sup> and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (Deuteronomy 30:19-20)*

Do you hear that? Do you hear the longing in God to bless his people, give his people life, to give life to you and to me. Let's take this definition of what God's blessing is all about and apply it to the fundamental promise that God made to Abraham – because then it reads like this – the reading in black.

*<sup>1</sup> 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.*

*<sup>2</sup> "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.*

*<sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (Genesis 12:1-3 NIV)*

*<sup>1</sup> 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.*

*<sup>2</sup> "I will make you into a great nation and I will put my life in you; I will make your name great, and you will bring life to others.*

*<sup>3</sup> I will give life to those who give life to you, and whoever takes life from you I will take life from them; and all peoples on earth will be filled with my life through you." (Genesis 12:1-3 Steve's paraphrase)*

So the biblical definition of God's blessing is *the flow of God's life into our life*. It's like a spiritual blood transfusion full of the wondrous qualities of God. Now compare that with the old English definition we looked at earlier, which defined blessing as *something a priest does in order to make us holy before God*. Can you see that there is a remarkable difference between these two definitions? The old English definition of blessing begins with the premise that we human beings are bad and we need some kind of spiritual blessing soap from a priest in order to be decent and presentable before God. The biblical definition of blessing begins with the premise that it is in the nature of God to bless us with his life and therefore we are encouraged to seek that blessing. Now I want you to imagine the difference between a church that operates on the old English definition of blessing and a church that operates on the biblical definition of blessing. The old English definition of blessing would create a church in which at their heart people would feel unworthy and would be reliant on the priestly rituals for their sense of life. The biblical definition of blessing would create a church in which in which people feel loved by God and hungry and thirsty to receive God's life. So which church would you prefer to belong to which blessing would you prefer to live under?

Second big question, when God blesses us with his life what is in that blessing? Let me give you just a bit of a taste.

**1. Significance** - Remember when someone first became aware of your existence and began to focus on you, and out of that flowed these wonderful feelings of significance and encouragement - that is life - and God wants to lavish that upon you. He knows you, when you sit down and when you rise. He knows your thoughts from afar, he watches your coming and you're going (Psalm 139:1-3), and even the number of hairs on your head are important to him (Matthew 10:29-31), you matter

to the most significant being in the universe – so you really matter – let that life fill you and be blessed.

**2. Purpose** – remember when you first started making a contribution to a family, to a team, or to a project – and out of that flowed a sense of purpose, a sense that your life had some meaning, that there was a place on this planet where your presence made sense because you fulfilled a purpose. That is life and God wants to lavish that life upon you, Because you were made in God’s image (Genesis 1:27), and your life is recorded in God’s personal book (Psalm 139:15-16) and he has a purpose for your life, *for we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do* (Ephesians 2:10), In God you have valuable things to do, that only you can do – let that life fill you and be blessed.

**3. Love** - Do you remember when it first occurred to you that someone in this world loved you very much and really wanted to be with you - and out of that flowed the most incredible sense of wellbeing that you had ever felt. That is life and God wants to lavish that life upon you. *How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!* (1 John 3:1). God says I love you with an everlasting love (Jeremiah 31:3) He loves us so much that he sent his only son to die for us (John 3:16),. You are a much loved member of God’s family – let that life fill you and be blessed.

**4. Comfort** – Do you remember someone whose arms were so safe and so welcoming that you brought your sadness to them and you just buried yourself in their arms and you wanted to stay there for ever and ever, and in those arms you began to feel your heart mending. That is life and God wants to lavish that life upon you. God says come to me, when you feel all busted up like crushed grass or barely alive like a smouldering wick (Isaiah 42:3). Come to me when you are exhausted and tired and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28). Come to me when you are broken hearted because I will come close to you (Psalm 34:18). Come to me because I long for the day when you will be with me and I will wipe away your tears and I will take away your pain (Revelations 21:3-4). Come to me and let that life fill you and be blessed.

**5. Forgiveness** – Do you remember carrying something really heavy for a long, time, how your arms and your body ached, and how wonderful it was when you could let go of that weight. That is forgiveness, while we don’t sense the weight of our sins quite as clearly as a physical weight, spiritual weights are just as real and far more crippling and to be free of the weight of guilt is simply delicious. That is life and God wants to lavish that life upon you, in Jesus, in his death, you are forgiven (1 John 2:12), whatever weight of guilt you are carrying around you can drop right now because Jesus has paid the price and has set you free – let that life fill you and be blessed.

These are just a taste of the life God wishes to pour into us, his blessings, available to every person in this room and every person on this planet through Jesus Christ. Paul says:

*He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. (Galatians 3:14)*

The blessing of God's very life promised to Abraham and to the world are fulfilled in Jesus who brings us life in the Spirit, which is our spirit to spirit interface with the life of God, the Holy Spirit is the tube going into our arm with a transfusion of God's life.

Because of this John says of Jesus:

*In him was life, and that life was the light of men. (John 1:4)*

Have you received that life? Pressed down, shaken together, running over, pouring into your lap (Luke 6:38). Jesus said:

*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (John 10:10)*

So what's it going to be? Are we going to be thief's that take life or are we going to be a people of blessing who receive life and give life?

Let's pray