

SERIES: Who Am I? Discovering Our God Given Identity. (Slide #1)

TITLE: “Priesthood 101: Giving What We Have Received”

TEXT: Genesis 12:1-3; 1 Peter 2:9-10

DATE: August 5, 2007

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. We look for a third week at our God-given identity
 1. During the sabbatical, word that kept coming to me from the Lord was this: **(Slide #2)** *The Church does not understand who they are. God’s people have an identity crisis. The people of God need to be reminded of their God-given identity and challenged to lay hold of it.*
 2. **(Slide #3)** As we have begun our time of self-discovery we so far have discovered two truths:
 - a. WE ARE BLESSED.
 - b. WE ARE CITIZENS OF A HOLY NATION.
- B. As we look again at our text in Genesis 12:1-3 – The Covenant formula established between God and all who would follow after Him – along with 1 Peter 2:9-10, we discover a THIRD critical mark.
- C. Once again this week, let me introduce this second mark as follows. . . .
- D. **(Slide #4) Illustration: Some Blessing Stories.**
 1. **Story #1:** People in my life who I have found to be a blessing just to be around: Dave Graffenberger, Jim Tharp, Chuck Zink, Jim Daniel, Judy Brehm, Darrell Westurn. (There are some of you here that I feel the same about, but I won’t mention your names publically for the sake of not embarrassing you.)
 2. **Story #2:** The shock Nancy and I went through when we came to Immanuel:
 - a. Salary at Springwater went from \$175/week in 1988 to a huge salary of \$250/week in 1994. To make ends meet Nancy had to work 30 hours per week and that barely paid all our bills. When we came here Nancy and I thought we had become millionaires. We were paid more than my salary and Nancy’s put together. WE WERE BLESSED. WE ARE STILL BLESSED.
 - b. Our first Christmas here the church gave Nancy and I a Christmas check for a little over \$2,000. We were clueless about what to do with such blessing. Ultimately I remember this: Nancy and I looked at each other and said, “We can’t keep all this! We have to find someone to give some of this blessing to because it’s just too much.”
 3. **Story #3:** The Christmas gifts from the Larry Lain family last year.
 - a. Show bottle of Red Hot – listen, I love Red Hot and spicy foods, but let’s be honest: this is too much.
 - b. The only way this is going to be used up is if we give some of it away. Anybody wants some?
- E. This brings us to our third identifying mark. Our first is that we are blessed. Our second is that we belong to the Great Nation of God. Our third is this. . .

II. **(Slide #5) IDENTIFYING MARK #2: WE ARE “A PRIESTHOOD OF BLESSINGS”!**

- A. Just like the first two marks of identification, I’m pretty excited about this third mark, for it says something startlingly exciting about who we are in Christ.

- B. To discover this third truth we need to look very carefully at our verses. The first two identifying marks were really clear for our text just says it straight out: “I will make you a great nation and I will bless you.”
- C. Believe it or not, this third mark is stated equally clear, but for some reason it’s harder to see; but it’s right there written in black and white.
- D. Listen to the words of God issued to Abram in the covenant words of (**Slide #6**) Gen. 12:2-3 – ***“I will make you 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 will be cursed; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”***
- E. Listen to the wonderful words of Peter who, in a sense, restates the covenant miracle in (**Slide #7**) 1 Peter 2:9: ***“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”***
- F. (**Slide #8**) Think with me for a few moments about this third critical identifying mark of the believer: We are Blessing Priests:
1. I need for you to follow along carefully with me this morning, for we find in the Abram covenant – which belongs to all in the line of Abram, including us – a critical progression of thought and it is all built around the central word: BLESS or BLESSED or BLESSING.
 2. There is a three step progression – one step built upon the other – in the Abram covenant that builds around this theme of blessing. Follow with me if you will:
 3. (**Slide #9**) STEP 1: “I will bless you” – **this is blessing received.**
 - a. As the Abram covenant begins, God issues some wonderful words that we looked carefully at two weeks ago: “I will bless you.”
 - b. They are words of promise as well as words of identification.
 - c. In those words, as we saw two weeks ago, God is saying something like this: “As my covenant people, here’s how life is going to be: Every day when we wake up we are going to sit on the side of our beds and say to ourselves, “I am so blessed I can’t hardly stand it.” At the same time, God in heaven is going to be saying to Himself, “He’s up/she’s up. Show time! I have a new set of blessings to pour out today that are going to be so great. I can’t wait.”
 - d. To those who agree to walk obediently with the Lord and trust Him (this is our side of the covenant), it is God’s promise and intention to bless our socks off day after day, year after year, for all of our lives.
 - e. In response first step in the development of the “blessings progression,” the response of God’s people should be something like this: “I am so blessed. I am so grateful to God for His bountiful blessings. As I look at my life, it is a life told from victory to victory, blessing to blessing. When looked at in its entirety, the evidence all says “BLESSED.”
 - f. Will there be valleys along the way? Of course. But an honest look at the life of the believer is that the valleys are not the times that define us; they are merely precursors to the mountains: the hard times are simply stages upon which God performs blessings.
 - g. Folks, we should still be rejoicing from two weeks ago because God said many years ago, and continues to say it today: I WILL BLESS YOU! This is our identity. As recipients of the promise we are the blessed people of God. We are challenged to celebrate it.
 - h. But note this key truth this morning: This promise of blessings received is only the first step in what God has in mind. God continues in His use of “blessing language” to offer a second

step in the progression of blessing.

4. **(Slide #10) STEP 2: “You will be a blessing” – this is blessing lived.**
 - a. To understand this second step, and at the same time begin to lay claim to our third key distinguishing mark as Christians, it is critical that we look very carefully at the wording of the last six words of verse 2: “and you will be a blessing.”
 - b. To be honest, just looking at those words this morning is not even enough; we need to look at the original Hebrew language to discover the full impact of what is being said.
 - c. **DISCLAIMER:** I did not study Hebrew and don’t read Hebrew, so I’m leaning on the knowledge of those who do, specifically Gordon Wenham writing in the Word Biblical Commentary.
 - d. The words, “you will be a blessing” are used in only two other places in the entire Old Testament, each time with the same meaning, and the meaning is critical.
 - e. In essence, the words of the Lord mean this:
 - (1) It speaks of a life that is lived so in keeping with an abundance of blessings that when people look at the person they say to themselves: “There goes the living expression of what it means to be blessed.”
 - (2) It is a life that walks so clearly in the way of blessing that others will say to themselves, “I just wish I could somehow be as blessed as that person.”
 - (3) **OR,** to put it another way, it is a life that is so well lived that others will say something like this: “I am blessed simply because I know you and have the opportunity to be around you. Your life exudes blessing so powerfully that it spreads blessings to others.”
 - f. Let me put it this way: It is one thing to be blessed. It is still another thing to **LIVE** like we are blessed. When we **LIVE** like we are blessed, our every exhale of life declares blessedness. It is a life that **LIVES** thankfully, **LIVES** joyfully, **LIVES** righteously, at the same time **LIVES** humbly because there is an awareness that such blessing comes from the Lord.
 - g. We have all met men or women in our lives who have discovered this second level of blessing. When we are around them we feel blessed. Just rubbing shoulders with them, observing their continence and behavior and hearing their speech makes us feel blessed because we have been around them.
 - h. Somehow being around such men or women of blessing makes us feel better about ourselves, makes us feel more joyful and hopeful, makes us feel more holy.
 - i. Such a status carries with it an added promise issued by the Lord in verse 3: “I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you will be cursed.” What does that mean?
 - (1) Simply, those who acknowledge your blessedness will at the same time be blessed.
 - (2) Equally simply, those who speak disdainfully of your blessedness will be cursed – they will void themselves of the gift of blessing because of their slanderous words. (**NOTE:** the first word “curse” is actually “disdain.”)
 - j. Folks, those are pretty powerful words and great words of hope. They say to each of us in search of our full identity in Christ: not only are you blessed, you are a blessing. . . that is, if you walk and live in the truth of your status in God.
 - k. Seemingly enough, but not enough for God, a third step is offered in respect to blessing as we look at the final words of the covenant stated in the second part of verse 3.
5. **(Slide #11) STEP 3: “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” – this is blessing “dispensed” (assuming our pre-designed role as the Priesthood of Blessings)**

- a. Critical to note is this: God’s covenant does not stop at the end of verse 2 or even half way through verse three; the covenant continues all the way through to the end of verse 3.
- b. As we come to the last ten words of the covenant, the “voice” changes from passive to active.
 - (1) The first step is passive: we receive blessing not because we earned it; it is given.
 - (2) The second step is passive and active: we are a blessing because we have been blessed, but it also requires that we walk in that blessing and exude it.
 - (3) This third step is active: God is saying point blank, “Take your blessing and your blessedness on the road to all the world.”
- c. In the final ten verses of the covenant God calls the “royal priesthood of believers,” as Peter states it in 1 Peter 2:9, to do their job: Go bless the world. “Dispense” the blessing. Spread it around so others can receive God’s goodness, including His greatest blessing of all: forgiveness and the gift of eternal life.
- d. In other words, in the final analysis, God does not bless us so that we can become peacocks – parading around proudly showing off our good fortune; He blesses us so that we might become homing pigeons – delivering messages of blessings to the world, coming home and getting filled up again, and then delivering the message again and again and again.
- e. Practically speaking, how does that happen?
 - (1) It begins with holy living – living as blessed Christians in the world, not just in church.
 - (2) It continues as we offer to others activities of blessing: we offer to pray for one in distress or need, we offer help to someone in need, we serve instead of demanding to be served, we love instead of judge, we care instead of ignore, we stop pointing at peoples sin and we point sinful people to Christ, we become Jesus to a world desperately looking for Jesus.
 - (3) Step three is the step that tells us that God and the church are not the end – they are only the first two steps. The final step that fulfills God’s covenant is taking the church to the world.
 - (4) It is the requirement placed upon the church to look beyond themselves to the mission.
 - (5) It is God’s ultimate and final plan: We are to be Blessings Priest.
- f. This third step understands a critical truth: God not only blesses His people; He over-blesses them. Each of us has been blessed more than we can contain or use. The extra was given to us to give away. If we don’t, then the blessings are wasted.

III. (Slide #12) Laying Claim to Our Identity.

- A. So what do we do with these great blessings? How do we respond to such tremendously good news?
- B. It seems to me that the application these three steps of blessing are as important as the truths themselves, and I want to make that application as follows: Each step in receiving and living and acting upon our status as blessed and blessing has a right and a wrong response to it.
 1. When we respond correctly, then God moves us to the next step.
 2. When we respond incorrectly, then we are in danger of not only losing that part of God’s blessing, but also canceling out all of His blessings.
- C. What are the right and wrong responses to each step of blessing:
 1. Step 1: “I will bless you” – **this is blessing received.**
 - a. The right response: We praise God for His goodness and celebrate it and acknowledge that we are truly blessed. We acknowledge our blessings and live thankfully.

- b. The wrong response: We act selfishly, replacing praise with demands that God give to us even more. Greed propels us to act as if we have not been blessed at all. Such selfishness negates God's blessings and results in a life of misery and moaning.
2. Step 2: "You will be a blessing" – **this is blessing lived.**
- a. The right response: We live who we are and do so humbly. We understand that our status is not earned, but received. We live lives that honor the gift: lives of holiness that exhibit the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.
 - b. The wrong response: We live a life of pride, looking down upon others who are not as good as us, speaking negatively of others.
- Let me pause a few more moments here, because there is a critical truth to be learned. God was not just rambling when He said, "I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you."
- Often even the blessed void their blessings by ignoring the words of God here. It seems to me that many Christians and many churches curse themselves here.
- When we speak disdainfully about another Christian, we bring curse upon ourselves.
When we speak disdainfully about another church, we bring curse upon ourselves.
God would say clearly as a word of warning: Don't mess with His anointed. And that word goes even to the anointed. Get my drift?
1. Step 3: "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you." – **this is blessing "dispensed" (assuming our pre-designed role as the Priesthood of Blessings)**
- Right response: servant hood, mission, evangelism, taking God to the streets.
Wrong response: laziness, disobedience, greed – I'm just gonna live for me and no one else.
God is challenging you and me to be "blessing priests."

(Slide #13) Final Application.

It seems that the topic of this morning is both exciting and challenging.

It's exciting to think that God not only loves to bless us, but He transforms us into men and women of blessing for others.

It seems overwhelming to believe that we can bring blessing to our world.

As challenging as it is to believe, this is our identity.

The application question for this morning is this: Are we willing to accept our identity? Or we willing to believe that God can use us to bless our world? Are we willing to accept that call?

I feel impressed this morning to end this service with an altar call with this challenge in mind: I want to invite you to these altars to declare to God that you are willing to accept your identity and to ask God to enable you to live who you are.

The best way to end this morning is in prayer. Won't you come?