

Title: *Blessed for the Nations*

Text: Genesis 12:1-9

As a 15-year-old girl in 1927, Lois Secrist promised God she'd go overseas as a missionary, perhaps to Africa or India, helping the needy. But Lois never made that trip of mercy.

At 23 she married Galon Prater, a handsome farmhand who became a heavy drinker.

Many years later, Galon did become a Christian and testify about the peace of Jesus to his drinking buddies. But by then he was almost 80 and nearing death. When he died January 9, 1988, Lois' childhood desire of becoming a missionary returned.

At first she resisted. At age 76, she felt her opportunity to serve overseas as a missionary had slipped away.

"I said, 'Lord, I'm too old to go now. I can't do this,'" Lois admits.

But this great grandmother was determined to fulfill her unforgotten promise. Lois, pricked by the memory of ignoring God's calling as a teenager, would not refuse a second chance at becoming a missionary.

So at 87, Lois Prater has become the unlikely builder of an orphanage in the Philippines, a lifeline to 35 children whose lives have been rescued from neglect, begging in the streets, and parental abuse.

Today the 35 orphans living in the two-story, 2,000 square foot white stucco home call Lois "Lola," which means "grandmother" in their native Tagalog language.

Lois's "children," as she calls them, range in age from eight months to 10 years. Each of their stories is heartbreaking.

Lois has built the orphanage without taking out a loan, relying instead on individual financial support from across the United States. Because of her age, she is not supported by any church denomination and depends solely on private donations.

When asked if that makes her nervous, she says confidently, "I serve a mighty God. He's in control. I feel I'm not talented enough to do any of this. But God enables me. My responsibility is to do what I can."

Lola's move to the mission field at the age of 76 was not without precedent in the great sweep of salvation history. Abraham was 75 years old when he left everything comfortable and familiar behind him to go to a place that God would show him. All he knew was that the call of God was upon his life.

We're looking at David Platt's book *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream*. We're looking these days at what it is to live a life of radical discipleship. Some of the ideas that are described as radical in the book are really nothing other biblical Christianity. There's nothing wrong with the American Dream per se. As we defined it last week, James Truslow Adams said, "is a dream wherein each man and woman can attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and to be recognized for

who they are.” That’s a great concept and it’s good and what that should do for those of us who are Christ followers is give us the freedom to pursue what our real priority ought to be and that’s the Great Commission.

Someone came to me and said, “We’ve been reading the book and my wife says she feels guilty that she’s not on the mission field.” I would say a couple of things in response to that. Not everyone is called to pick up stakes and move overseas into full-time missionary service, though I firmly believe that more are called than actually go. With the opportunities that we have nowadays, the question is not will I be a missionary, but what is my role in fulfilling the Great Commission. There are opportunities right here at home in a nation and a culture that is largely turning its back on God, but even with that we still have no shortage of people who have a “heart for America” but there are a lot more people trying to reach America than there are a lot of the unreached peoples of this world who according to the Scripture, have to be reached before Christ comes again.

God is inviting you to walk in a love relationship with Him that invites us to be a part of his work. We can go back to the very beginning of salvation history and see God choosing an unlikely man by the name of Abram and says, “I’m going to change the course of history. I’m going to reveal myself to the world.”

The story picks up at the end of chapter 11, in verse 27 with some information about Abram’s family of origin. He was the son of Terah, his wife’s name was Sarai. We also read that Sarai was barren. You know that in biblical times, there was no greater stigma than to be barren. Genesis 1-11 which gives us some of the pre-history of God’s dealings with His people ends in hopelessness. Humanity has rebelled against God, the earth has been destroyed by the flood, and as society attempts to rebuild, their inclination is to make a name for themselves at Babel and the chapter ends with the footnote, almost, about Sarai’s barrenness.

When Joshua is addressing the Israelites in Joshua 24:2-3 “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshiped other gods.’³ But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the River and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants.

Terah may have been one who actually worshiped other gods. Somehow or other there was a stirring in his spirit that caused him to leave Ur of the Chaldees and travel to Haran.

Excavations at Ur under the sponsorship of the University of Pennsylvania, turned up a “great civilization that [the lead archaeologist Leonard] Woolley was later to describe: a city surrounded by bounteous gardens with groves of figs and dates and tall palms standing by mathematically straight irrigation canals, a city of temples and warehouses, workshops and schools, spacious villas and the towers they called ziggurats, all within a great wall overlooking the waters of the Euphrates.

Sounds like a nice place to me – a thriving and prosperous place. Not a place that one would necessarily be in any great hurry to leave, but all was not necessarily well in Ur. Excavations that show great prosperity and advancement also discovered evidence of

human sacrifice.

Abram's father was sensitive enough to want to leave such a place and travel to Haran. There is a break between Genesis 1-11 and what we read beginning in chapter 12.

Notice, the first verse doesn't say, "The Lord said." Instead, it says, "The Lord **had** said." One could get the sense that this call had come to him at some earlier point and had perhaps been rolling around in his heart and mind for some time.

Genesis 12:1 says, "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." We don't know when that call had come for the first time or the exact form that it took. He may well have heard an audible voice telling him to leave Ur of the Chaldees and go on this mystery tour with God. He may have heard the call in a way which was much louder than an audible voice. He was living amongst a pagan people. He was in a city which had prosperity. But the voice of God came to him and told him, "I have something better for you."

You may be here this morning in spiritual seeker mode. You come to church perhaps because you know that it's a nice, respectable thing to do. Maybe you're here under duress. Maybe it's your sincere heart's desire to worship God, to hear a word spoken into your life, like an apple of gold in a setting of silver. Perhaps God will use this story today from the life of Abraham to awaken a restlessness in your soul and say to you, "I want you to leave your familiar. I want you to step out of your comfort zones and follow me." Life is not about comfort, or ease, or familiarity. It's about taking risks and stepping out in faith even when we're not sure where it is that we're going.

Along with the invitation to leave his home and his familiar, God gave Abram a promise. Notice in verses 2 and 3 how many times God says, "I will."

He says, "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. ³ **I will** bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you **I will** curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." It is of God's initiative and the rest of the story of the Bible is the unfolding and the fulfillment of the promise that God made to Abram.

There's only one Abram in God's plan. He played a unique role that entitles him to be called the father of the faithful. Hebrews 11 says, "⁸ By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. ⁹ By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God."

Abram went, not knowing where he was going. He had the promises of God ringing in his ears. The promise that he would be made into a great nation and that he would walk under the blessing of God. Remember, up until this time, his wife had been barren and

there were no descendants. She was past child-bearing age and there was no hope. As you track out the story of Abraham (as he would later be called) you realize that it was not until another 25 years later that the promise of an heir would be fulfilled. Abraham got into sin because he tried to take matters into his own hands. He thought that he would adopt his servant Eliezer and that God would build a great nation through him. He fathered a child with his wife's handmaiden, Hagar, but that wasn't in God's plan. History books record the centuries-long conflict between the descendants of Isaac and the descendants of Ishmael – Abram's son with Hagar.

Today's theme is that God invites you to join him in his work. Think of the invitation that came to Abram. It was for blessing. God says, "I will bless you. I will make your name great and I will bless those who bless you." Abram may have scratched his head sometimes and wondered, "What's this blessing going to look like?" When the call to leave Haran and start walking with God came to him, he took his nephew Lot with him. They got to the point where they had so many flocks and herds between them that the land could not sustain them both so they divided up. Lot had first choice of the land and chose the better land for himself and left Abram with the land that was less well-watered. He had to go to battle to rescue Lot from getting caught in the cross-fire of a war. In chapter 15, he's discouraged and God says to him, "Don't be afraid, Abram. I am your shield and your very great reward." Abram replies, "What can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?"

I came across a quote this week by Dallas Willard who said, "Somebody who wants to follow God, this is your first task: to come to truly love and constantly delight in that Heavenly Father made real to earth by Jesus, and become quite certain that there is no catch, no limit to the goodness of His intentions or His power to carry them out."

It sounds like Abram is getting seriously close to questioning God's good intentions for him and his power to carry them out to completion. That is to say that walking with God doesn't mean that there will be no discouragements. It does mean that God has a plan and a purpose and that plan can only be thwarted by our own disobedience or lack of receptivity toward it.

God says, "Not only will I bless you, you will be a blessing and all nations will be blessed by you and through you and those who curse you will be cursed." The application I would make of that for us today is that when God invites us to go on a journey with him and to be a part of his plan, it is indeed His plan. People will then be judged not by what they think of us, but by how they respond to God's plan. That means that we have a big responsibility to make sure that we are hearing his voice and that we get on board with what is truly His agenda. Then people will be judged based on how they respond and react to what he's doing through us.

You have to love what the text says in verse 4. After this call from God came, there's no recorded time of deliberation. No dialogue as to what all will be involved – things I might be inclined to want to ask. Instead, it says, "So Abram left."

Abram was 75 and he took his wife, all of his possessions and went walking west with God not sure where he would wind up, but knowing that if God was in it and he had the promise of blessing that he would be okay."

I've mentioned this before in preaching about Abram but I'll repeat it. The motto of his life was *Tent and altar*. His motto was tent because he lived a life of permanent impermanence. It was a call to leave the comfortable and the familiar and to walk with God. It was altar because he built an altar of worship everywhere he went.

⁹ By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. ¹¹ By faith Abraham, even though he was past age – and Sarah herself was barren – was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise. ¹² And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore. ¹³ All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. ¹⁴ People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ Instead, they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.