

The Line of Promise

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, good morning. If you've got a Bible, please do keep it open at that passage that Ross just read for us as we work through it together. In life, something I find really important is to have people around you that you can totally rely upon.
- Whether that's to reach out to them when things are going really well and you want to enjoy that together, or when things are really hard, when you're at a low point, you want to have people that you know you can reach out to, who you can rely upon and who will be there for you.
- But a problem with relying on people is that they're also human. They also have their own stuff going on in their lives. Sometimes something happens in your life and the person you hope to be there for you, they just can't be there.
- They're not able to, not because they're a bad person, but because life can get in the way and they've got their own things going on. And they're just not able to be there.
- And so I've been so encouraged this last week as I've been reading this passage, because it's a great reminder to each of us that God himself can always be completely relied upon.
- [1 : 2 2] He's completely faithful. Even though we so often mess up, get things wrong, his plan to save a lost world, the one who will come and who will defeat sin and death.
- If you remember in chapter 5, I've got a genealogy there, and there was a repeated refrain, and it was, and he died. Each person's name was mentioned and it finished, and he died, and he died.
- And this genealogy is kind of reminiscent of chapter 5 in many ways, but that refrain, and he died, is removed. Not because they didn't die, but because the author here is now trying to convey the reality of hope.
- At the point of chapter 5 was that death reigned, and although death still reigns here in chapter 11, the author is trying to convey to us a sense of hope.
- And that hope is eventually to be found in this line of shame. You see, the big point of this genealogy is that God's plan of redemption will come to fruition.
- [2 : 3 4] That God works even when we least deserve His kindness. We saw last week the way in which mankind rejected the rule of God. The way that mankind conspired together to seek their own glory.
- We read that they sought to make a name for themselves. And as a result, God then divided the nations and scattered them. But even while that was going on, even while that rejection at the Tower of Babel was happening, the living God was still working out His plan of salvation for these rebellious people.
- The author wants us to know that that was the case. Because part of the genealogy before us is also found in chapter 10. And if you have your Bible open, look back at chapter 10, verse 25, important verse there for where they can just now.
- We read there the line of shame. And we're told in important detail about Peleah. Genesis 10, 25. So Eber were born two sons.

The name of one was Pelech. For in his days, the earth was divided. In his days, the earth was divided.

[3 : 47] And that division that is being spoken of there, it's a reference to the scattering of the nations at Babel. The nations there, they were divided and scattered across the earth.

And so as we see the name of Pele, which means divided, right in the middle of our genealogy in chapter 11, the author is shouting to us loudly and clearly that even though humanity had collaborated in their rejection of God's rule, God himself still had not forgotten his promise to them.

He was choosing to not treat them as their actions deserved. But while they were at work together, rebelling, the living God was at work, redeeming.

With man's rebellion and desire for greatness as the backdrop, God was continuing this great line of promise that would eventually lead to the salvation and redemption of all who trusted in the promises of God.

We probably left last week thinking things really aren't looking good here. Humanity divided, scattered, living in rejection of God's rule.

[5 : 08] And then this week we come, following on from that, to this amazing genealogy that is layered with the grace of the living God. Though humanity did not deserve it, the line of promise continued.

In this genealogy, there is hope to be found for humanity. And also within it, I think there's a great lesson for us regarding the sovereignty and the providence of God.

That's just that he is ultimately the one who reigns over all of his creation. That he is the one who's at work in this creation, ruling over it and working out his purposes.

Just like God was quietly at work in this line of blessing, while chaos was in the background. So God is at work in the chaos of our world today.

And I think with that great truth that it should bring comfort to God's people. We can be encouraged that God can and that God does work in and through the bleakest of situations.

[6 : 17] And this truth gives purpose even in the midst of heartache. And I think that truth is always relevant, but I think especially just now as we look around our world, as we watch the news, we can't help but see many people conspiring together, rejecting God and his rule and doing what they see fit.

I think of the conflicts that we see across our world. Examples there of people uniting together, whether aware of it or not aware of it. They're united in their rebellion against God and his rule, seeking to call the shots.

And these verses here, they offer encouragement to those involved in those atrocities, but also to us who look on. They tell us that just like at Babel, when things looked chaotic, when things looked out of control, the living God is absolutely still at work in the midst of the chaos.

It doesn't make watching the news easy, but it does offer us a real comfort, a real encouragement in knowing that our God works even in the most awful of situations.

in the midst of a wicked generation who rejected God's rule, he was quietly at work raising up the line of shame, ensuring that the line of blessing would continue.

[7 : 58] And secondly, in the next genealogy, the next line of list of names, chapter 11, verse 27 through 32, we see there the line of promise, a dead end.

The line of promise, a dead end. The names Abram and Sarah, I'm probably just going to say it's Abraham and Sarah, I've been trying to say it how they're written, but their names changed quite soon after this and I'm just going to mix up I think, so we'll just call them Abraham and Sarah, which will be called a little later in the book of Genesis.

This transition of moving from the whole world focus that we've had throughout these 11 chapters and zooming into one family continues in these verses.

We now come to the generations of Terah, who was the father of Abraham, who we see in chapter 12 as the one through whom God will bless all the nations of the world.

And so these verses are tying together the genealogy of Shem to Abraham and then to the story that unfolds from him. We mentioned that Shem's genealogy was very similar to the one in chapter 5, but just without that refrain of, and he died.

[9 : 20] One of the key similarities between the genealogies in chapter 5 and 11 is the repetition of naming each person followed by and he fathered, and he fathered.

And so if you cash your eyes across chapter 11, you'll see that refrain, the great line of promise that's going well, except there's one person who jumps out at us from the words on the page.

Verse 27, Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran, Haran fathered Lot. Verse 29, Abraham and Nahor took wives, the name of Abraham's wife was Sarai in the name of Nahor's wife, Milca, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milca, Anisca.

And now verse 30 breaks off from this pattern that we've seen of people fathering, and that refrain, it's emphatically not repeated as we read Nahor's Sarai was barren, she had no child.

And this, clearly this should stand out to us, it should surprise us. The author has written in a way that has made us assume that this line of promise was going to continue down through Abraham.

[10 : 56] This we cause in verse 27 we read that Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Abraham's first name it comes first, and not necessarily because he was the firstborn, because he's the one through whom the line of blessing will continue.

It's a pattern we see, the name that comes first, the line will continue through. We know that because the author when he spoke of Noah's sons, he would always list them as Shem, Ham, Japheth, but the Bible tells us that Japheth is actually Shem's older brother, and so we can have confidence that because Abraham's name appears first before his brothers, the author is conveying that direction of the line of promise through Shem, down to Terah, and now to Abraham, which means verse 30.

all the more shocking, his wife, Sarah, was barren. She had no child. And so is this it?

Is this the line of promise at a dead end? And we should be zooming in on the line from which the promised serpent crusher will come, but we've arrived at a seemingly dead end.

God is God through the author emphasizing beyond any speck of doubt that his plan of salvation for this world is a work of him and of him alone.

[12 : 32] We could have read the previous genealogy from Shem as actually just being the line of blessing, filling the earth, multiplying as they were told, rather than seeing it as God being gracious, we could think that man is working this line of blessing out on his own.

But verse 30 is there to tell us that that is absolutely not the case. If God's plan of salvation through this line of blessing was down to man, then right here at verse 30 it would come to an abrupt halt.

that's of course not the case. This isn't a down to just man, but it is God who is at work.

There's nothing that Sarah, there's nothing that Abraham or anyone could have done about what was going on here. The promised line in human eyes has come to a dead end.

And that is where of course we can't have the overarching Bible story and how this fits in and how it's so key. But I think it would be wrong for us to simply forget that Abraham and Sarah were also just two normal people who lived on this earth that we live on.

- [14 : 01] Two normal people who were married and who struggled with something that isn't uncommon in this life. There were a couple who knew the pain of childlessness.
- Some of us sitting here perhaps know a little or much of that pain. I don't want us to lose sight of that. I don't want to undermine it in any way.
- In fact, I want to acknowledge it. Childlessness is a painful subject. One childless couple, they described the feeling like this.
- They said it's that strange grief which has no focus for its tears, no object for its love.
- There's no anniversary of childlessness on which friends might send a card of condolence, no grave to visit and remember, no photograph or name or memory of the child who never came.
- [15 : 13] It's just an emptiness, a naughtness, a joy that didn't come, a hope forever damaged.
- And that was the reality for Abraham and Sarah. That was something of their experience, something of their pain.
- Perhaps even more difficult for them because in those days, people wrongly believed that childlessness was closely related to unrighteousness.
- People perhaps were whispering what do you think they did to deserve this? We know, today we know that that is not the case. We know that it's not how it should be either.
- In this life we know that it's a sign of the brokenness of humanity. And it's something that causes us, all of us, to groan for the new creation when all things will one day be made right, when things will be made perfect.
- [16 : 29] And that new creation that we groan for is secured through this line of promise that seemingly here arrived at a dead end.
- What was impossible for man? It was completely possible for the living God as he blessed this couple at a very old age with a child, Isaac, in miraculous circumstances.
- That's because when God makes a promise, he always keeps it. And this reminds us that God, he so often works in unexpected ways.
- since before the earth was created, he had planned that through this couple who were unable to have children, he would continue the great line of promise that would eventually lead to the Lord Jesus.
- Childlessness in the Old Testament was often viewed as a state of hopelessness, not having an heir. It was a reason to completely despair.
- [17 : 44] And that picture of hopelessness, that picture of people despairing, God took that picture right here in Genesis 11 and he flipped it on his head, he turned it upside down.
- He blessed them and through them eventually he blessed all nations. It's an amazing picture really pointing us clearly and straight to the cross of our Lord Jesus.
- The cross itself, the Roman cross was a picture of death. It was a method of execution for criminals and God took that picture of death and he flipped it on its head.
- Read in 1 Corinthians 1 27 there that God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.
- In these verses we have a foreshadow of the upside down nature of the gospel. The cross is no longer a horrible picture of death but it's a beautiful picture of life.
- [19 : 02] It's not remembered so much as a method of execution for criminals but it's remembered as the solution to our problem of sin. For at the cross that was the place that love and mercy met.
- The son of God the seed of the women where he defeated sin and death for us. The line of promise continued.

The line of promise did not hit a dead end. And now thirdly and finally the line of promise will bring blessing.

Genesis 12 1 through 3. The plan for this series was really to stop at the end of chapter 11 but we thought it would be helpful to finish the series by looking briefly at the great promise that God made to Abraham.

And we won't dig into it too much because of time. But these are really foundational verses in the Bible. Much of the rest of the Bible is God showing us exactly how he will build a nation from Abraham and how through one of his descendants all the nations of the earth will enjoy blessing.

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it's been quite clear in the opening of living chapters that the people have generally been moving further and further away from God.

And the Bible kind of highlights that they've been travelling east. And in the Bible that's symbolic for moving away. also in this call of Abraham, notice with me that the emphasis is very much upon God.

It's upon what God himself is going to do. And God says in verse 1 that Abraham is to go to the land that I will show you.

Verse 2, I will make of you a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great. Verse 3, I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonours you.

[22 : 51] I will curse. In these three verses we see the living God is committing himself to doing these things. He is going to do this through and for Abraham.

Now Abraham heard the call of the Lord. And we read in verse 4 that Abraham went just as the Lord had told him. He obeyed and he's commended for that obedience in Hebrews chapter 11.

Abraham left the life that he knew and he chose then to follow the living God, the God of the Bible. And we see as the story of the Bible unfolds that all that God promised here to Abraham comes true.

He turns this one man into a great nation, into the nation of Israel. Because he's the patriarch of that nation, his name becomes so great, Father Abraham.

Just as God said in verse 2 that he would make his name great. That does happen. And that's actually the part of these verses that struck me the most this week.

[24 : 06] I will make your name great. And that's because I think it's intentionally in contrast with the account of the Tower of Babel we had last week.

Let me just read chapter 11 verse 4. Read there, Then he said, Come, let us build ourselves a city and tower with its tops in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves.

Let us make a name for ourselves. And the arrogant, selfish, sinful desire of man to make a name for themselves.

But here, God says to Abraham, I will make a name for you. I will make your name great.

And his name does become great, not because of what he does, but because his trust is in the Lord. It's an amazing contrast between the event at Babel.

[25 : 13] Perhaps the greatest thing about Abraham's name is when we come to the New Testament, when we read of his name in Matthew chapter 1 verse 1.

Read there that that is the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. This unsuspecting man, at the head of this great royal line, the line of promise that leads all the way down to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, though, in Genesis 12, what it seems like, it seems like God has zoomed in on one family and forgotten the rest of the world.

But we see that that is completely wrong. God has zoomed in on this one family because he has the whole world in mind. Because it is through this one family that all the earth will be blessed as the Lord Jesus comes from this very line in order to give up his own sinless life so that our relationship of the living God that was broken in Genesis 3 could be restored.

Genesis 12, 1-3, it's like the whole Bible story in a little nutshell. The rest of the Bible is just God showing us how that's going to happen.

[26 : 42] And we see it come into fruition in and through the Lord Jesus. The line of promise continues in the face of humanity rejecting God and conspiring against them.

The line of promise does not hit a dead end but God provides an heir to Abraham the Sarah. And the line of promise will bring blessing to the whole earth as we see today that it has done in and through our Lord Jesus Christ.

As we work through these early chapters of Genesis it's been no secret that sin is everywhere. It's been no secret that sin has spoiled God's good creation and every turn we've come face to face with the brokenness of humanity and indeed the brokenness of our own world as we've linked it forward to what we see.

We notice clearly the way in which these chapters, though from thousands of years ago, explain what has caused the problems in this world in which we live today.

And it's sin that has caused those problems is that rejection of God's rule and desire to do our own thing. And today, this very day, we cling to the same promise that Abraham himself clung on to.

[28 : 14] And that is the promise that God will one day make a new heavens and a new earth where there will be no more pain, no more sadness, death, or tears.

And we know that Abraham looked forward to this because he read of it in Hebrews 11 verse 9 and 10. We read there, By faith he, Abraham, went to live in the land of promise as in a foreign land, living in tent with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.

For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

These early chapters of Genesis, they tell us in no uncertain terms what is wrong with the world, but they also tell us that God has promised to fix what is wrong, that he's promised to fix the brokenness, and they point us forward to the Lord Jesus, to the great serpent crusher from Genesis 3:15, who has come and who has defeated sin and death.

These chapters, they call upon each of us to recognize our own fallenness, our own inability to fix our problem of sin, and to put our faith in the Lord Jesus.

[29 : 36] And with Abraham, they call on each of us to look forward to God's doing it.

Let's pray. Thank you.