

## God Fills Our Greatest Needs With His Greatest Gift

- ☆ Beyond family (vv.1-3)
- ☆ Beyond possessions (vv.4-6)
- ☆ Beyond religion (vv.7-8)

In the name of Jesus, God's **Greatest Gift** to fill **Our Greatest Needs**, dearly redeemed:

“Why me?” Have you ever asked that? Who hasn't, right? It's usually when something bad is happening and we're wondering what God is doing. But, “Why me?” can also be asked in gratitude for God's blessings, especially because **God Fills Our Greatest Needs With His Greatest Gift**, first...

### ☆ Beyond family (vv.1-3)

If anyone had good reason, humanly speaking, to ask, “Why me?” it was Abram. Back in Ur of the Chaldees (Acts 7:2f), the LORD had said, **“Get out of your country and away from your relatives and from your father's house and go to the land that I will show you.”** Notice the pattern? The God of the Bible likes to attach a promise to every command. The LORD does not want slavish obedience, but eager effort to fulfill what He commands. God knows **Our Greatest Needs** and loves to fill them, especially **With His Greatest Gift**. So, He piles on more promises for Abram: **“I will make you a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great. You will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse anyone who dishonors you. All of the families of the earth will be blessed in you.”**

Ever wish God could be on your side like that? Have your back? Watch your “six”? Follow Jesus at night in our Gospel lesson today and hear what our Lord says to the religious leader Nicodemus: **“Amen, Amen, I tell you: Unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God! Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh. Whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit.”** (John 3:5f EHV) That explains why we so easily mess up even when we're trying to get it right. No one gets married to cause grief to the one you love, but we all grieve each other. You want to raise your children in God's fear and favor, but maybe fear outweighs favor, leaving scars you tried to avoid. You want to be patient with classmates, friends, coworkers, but something cranks you out. You can't get back those angry words. Sometimes your apologies are too little too late. We all need to be reborn by God's **Greatest Gift**.

When the LORD told Abram, later called Abraham, **“All the families of earth will be blessed in you,”** he made it clear over time that meant what Jesus told Nicodemus centuries later: **“God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”** (John 3:16 EHV) That **Gift** of our Lord Jesus Christ, saved the world from sin, death, and hell. That **Greatest Gift** fills our **Greatest Needs** with grace and peace from God. Maybe Abram felt he was giving up family back home, but he was gaining an eternal family that includes us by faith.

Once at Sunday dinner after preaching for a family friend, I tearfully stated, “I wish I had my earthly father's blessing.” His reply was classic comfort in Christ: “But, Mark, you have your heavenly Father's blessing.” There is no end to tears and heartache in our families despite the best efforts of fathers and mothers and children too. But in Christ Jesus, we have God's **Greatest Gift – Beyond family**.

You can't find a better goal in life than this: *To be a blessing*. As God's people, you bless the pastor every time you hear, “The Lord be with you,” and you reply, “And also with you.” We were family to William Snow, a developmentally challenged man whose advancing years made him tremble. But he traced my hand blessing with the sign of the cross, blessing me too, as members often said. One old man commented, “If all I got from church was the blessing at the end, it would be worth going.”

## ☆ Beyond possessions (vv.4-6)

Not all of us have been commanded by God to leave family and friends to go to a land far away. But all Christians are called to receive by faith God's **Greatest Blessing** in Christ our Savior far **Beyond** earthly **possessions**. God's promise motivates and empowers love for God and our neighbor overflowing.

For Abram it meant taking along his wife Sarai (Sarah) and nephew Lot to travel to and through the land of Canaan to a great oak tree at Moreh, near Shechem. *The Canaanites were in the land at that time*. These grossly immoral, idol worshiping inhabitants owned the land and controlled all commerce. How frightening to be surrounded by bigoted neighbors hating God and His people. But sometimes Abraham sold them short by misjudging them, thinking they had no fear of God, when they could act more righteous than he. Like when he lied about Sarah being his sister as if she were not his wife. (Genesis 12:19) Quarreling over water rights by herdsmen of Abram versus those of Lot led to family separation. Lies and arguments proved their family too needed God's **Greatest Gift Beyond possessions**.

During my college years as my own family proved our need for God's grace, there was a haunting twist on that *Why me?* question. Our college Dean<sup>1</sup> kept asking future pastor candidates, "If not you, who?" My soul-searching year working in a cabinet shop yielded far fewer opportunities to be a blessing than I expected. Rarely could I say anything about God's **Greatest Gift**, Abram's Seed, the Savior of the world. Not thinking of me, our home pastor preached on Jesus' *Parable of the Talents*, pointing out that *if you don't use them, you lose them*. Jesus also says, "**From everyone to whom much was given, much will be expected. From the one who was entrusted with much, much more will be asked.**" (Luke 12:48)

**God Fills Our Greatest Needs with His Greatest Gift – Beyond possessions.** But He still fills those needs too. Remembering Abram's travels and fearing my hobby was too heavy, I consulted the Seminary President who also built furniture. I shared how a fulltime pastor at the Campus House where I vicared found his camera equipment stolen and my power tools in a mail bag. He sat at the top of the steps with a baseball bat until police checked the basement – guns drawn. My counseling professor was not one for signs outside of Scripture, but testing everything by Scripture he noted, "Maybe God is trying to tell you something." God protected what I needed here, and moving has not been part of my ministry.

## ☆ Beyond religion (vv.7-8)

The LORD promised Abram literally, "**To your Seed will I give this land,**" connecting all to Christ, the promised Seed of the Woman who would crush the serpent's head. (Genesis 3:15; Galatians 3:15-18) "**God graciously gave [His covenant] to Abraham by a promise.**" As long as His descendants continued to believe and trust in the God of Abraham, they could keep the Promised Land. It was a gift connected with God's **Greatest Gift Beyond religion** of any kind this world can offer.

In fact, Christianity has been called "the Un-Religion." All others say, "Do!" then tell you, *Do more and more!* Preach that, and church fills up fast because that's what itching ears want to hear. But Christ's Un-religion says, "Done!" "**It is finished**" (John 19:30) by Christ alone, because there is no one righteous but Him. His blood alone could wash away the world's sin. **Greatest Gift Beyond religion.**

That's why twice right away in Canaan, Abram built altars out in the open and **proclaimed the name**, the saving reputation, **of the LORD**. Could God use you to do that full-time as one of our dearly needed pastors or teachers? *If not you, who?* Maybe your gifts are needed now for family care or directed by God in other ways. But your prayers are still needed for workers in the Lord's harvest.

Abram **pitched his tent** as a pilgrim (Hebrews 11:11-16) bound for greater glory **Beyond religion**. With blind poet Fanny Crosby, writing 50 years and 8,000 hymns, we praise God's **Greatest Gift** that fills our **Greatest Needs**. "To God be the glory, great things he has done!"<sup>2</sup> Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Dean Edward Lindemann, the former Northwestern College, Watertown, WI, my college years 1975-80.

<sup>2</sup> Fanny Crosby, 1820-1915. CWH 627: "To God Be the Glory"