

How are we? Genesis 12, that's where we'll start. The past is a funny thing. In fact, for all of the fear and anxiety and hope that people have for the future, the past is this thing that either make where we are right now and where we're going very beautiful, full of life, steadfast and unshakable or it's something that can rob us of vitality, energy, meaning and hope now. What I mean by that if is your past haunts you, if you're living off of past successes and not present realities or if you're burdened, overwhelmed by shame from past mistakes, then the vitality, richness and thickness of life now really suffers. This is one of the reasons that the apostle Paul says that leaving what is behind and pressing on towards what is ahead is so important. We don't live off of past successes, and we don't get paralyzed in life by past failures. Despite the fact that we all have past successes and past failures that have shaped us, they don't right now completely make us. So that's one of the mistakes that we can make with the past. But there's another mistake you can make with the past. If you don't know anything of the past, if all you know is small strokes and you know nothing of the broad strokes, if you know nothing of the metanarrative and all you know is your life. . .Over the last 200 years we have become extremely transient. With the road system and cars, you're much more likely to grow up away from where you know people, where your family is, where you're connected. And then on average, most Americans move cities every three to five years. So in that transient culture, there's very little roots, we're not a part of anything bigger than ourselves, it's just simply our life. And what happens when it's simply our life is you have a sense of being untethered, you have a loneliness issue and you have this kind of gnawing restlessness that life is without meaning. And that's what happens when there is no past. There's just you and wherever you are and whatever your situation and whatever your relationships are.

So here's what I want to try to do. We're beginning a new series today on the church, what it is, what it's not, how it works, how it doesn't work, what it was supposed to be, what God meant it to be. But before we do that, I want to tell you where we came from. And by "we" I mean the believers at the Village Church. Now to even have this discussion, we've got to go back to the beginning. And by "beginning," I mean around 1440B.C. 1440B.C. is when the oral traditions of creation being passed down hits Moses and Moses writes it. In Genesis, he writes that God creates the universe in *shalom*, in rhythm, in peace so that everything works like it's supposed to work. So we have wine, but we don't have alcoholism. We have food, but we don't have gluttony. We have sex, but we don't have lust. We have marriage, but we don't have in-laws...just kidding. So this is how it functions, and this is how it works. Sin enters into the world, fractures that *shalom*, fractures that rhythm and it begins to spiral out of control. Now in this spiraling, God shows up to a man named Abraham. Abraham is the father of the world's three great religions: Christianity, Islam and Judaism. Abraham is the father of all three of those, but you're going to see God show up to Abraham and here's what He's going to say. Look at Genesis 12. Starting in verse 1, "Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'" So God shows up to Abraham and says, "I'm going to reestablish, I'm going to reconcile, I'm going to fix, I'm going to bring back *shalom*, I'm going to bring back order, I'm going to bring back rhythm, and I'm going to do it through your line." Now Abraham's response was, "I don't have any sons, I'm old and my wife is as good as dead." And God says, "Don't worry about that." And decades go by, Abraham still doesn't have a son, God gives him a son in Isaac, some other things happens in there, a kid named Ishmael, which has created us problems ever since. And so we've got our boy Isaac, and then God comes to Abraham who loves Isaac like a father loves a son and He goes, "I want you to kill Isaac." And Abraham goes, "What about that 'Thou shall not kill' bill?" And God goes, "I want you to kill Isaac." And so Abraham gets a knife and some wood and then he packs the donkey and puts

Isaac on it. On the way up to the mountain, Isaac goes, "Where's the ram that we're supposed to sacrifice?" And even in that moment Abraham goes, "The Lord will provide the ram." So there's this idea of open theism that there's certain things God doesn't know and there are certain things that God does know. It's real weird heresy, but in the end what they want to say there is that God doesn't know what Abraham will do so He had to test him. So God's like, "Oh, I sure hope he's My man, because if he's not, this whole plan is off the rails." But if you'll actually read the story, that wouldn't even be a future thing; that would mean not only does God not know certain aspects of the future but He doesn't even know certain aspects of present reality. Which means I don't really want to worship anymore because He's no different than me. And Abraham goes, "There will be a ram. I don't know how it's going to work, I don't know how this is going down, but there's going to be a ram." And they head up the hill. And he gets there, Abraham pulls the knife out and God goes, "Stop!" and he stopped.

Now, go over to Genesis 22. We'll pick it up from there. A lot of what we're going to do is going to be narrative. I can't take you through all the text; we'd just be here forever. Starting in verse 15, "And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice." So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba. And Abraham lived at Beersheba." So God says, "I am going to use you and your descendants to reconcile the entire world." He didn't say he was just going to reconcile Israel. He didn't say, "I am going to make a nation of you, and that nation is what I'm saving." He has not said that. He has said in both instances of this covenant, "Through you and the line I am creating through you, I am going to reconcile the world back to Myself." Now this becomes consistent, constant language through the rest of the Old Testament.

Let me give you some examples here. At Mt. Sinai, Moses goes up onto the mountain and God says this, "Although the whole earth is Mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests." Now if you go and study the priestly system, the priests went in and did business between laymen and God. And He says, "What I'm doing through the line of Israel is creating a priestly community that will usher the rest of the world in to right relationship with God." So you've got it at Sinai where the ten commandments and the Law is given. As Joshua with the Israelites cross the Jordan into the Promised Land, he says, "God did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that there's a God." As Solomon dedicated the temple in his prayer, he says, "We have built this temple so that all the people of the earth may know Your name." If you'll leaf through the Psalms, you'll see over and over and over and over again, "Let the nations be glad...let the nations bow down...let the whole earth sing praises to His name..." It's very consistent in the prophets. The prophets are constantly saying, "This isn't just about Israel; this is going to be about the world. The nations are going to come and bow down." I'll give you one example although I could give you tons. Isaiah 45:22, "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth!" So this wasn't going to be a Jewish thing, this wasn't going to be an Israel thing; this was going to be "Through the Jews, through Israel, I'm going to reconcile, I'm going to make right, I'm going to restore *shalom*."

We get 400 years of silence now, and then the Messiah is born. Christ comes and continues this global language. In John 10:15-16, He says, "Just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd." So it's no longer Greek, Jew and gentile. No, it's one shepherd and one flock. In fact, Paul in Romans will even say, "Not all of Israel is Abraham's offspring." Yeah, this is going to be bigger than that. And then you've even got strange things that begin to happen. Jesus hanging on the cross in Matthew 27 cries out in Aramaic, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Now some people take, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." And what they'll say is at that moment, Christ became sin and turned His back on Jesus and no longer looked on Him. Have you heard that? There's monumental problems

with that interpretation. The first is even if God turns His back, He can still see. And the second one is just because it's cloudy out, doesn't mean you're getting away with anything. It's not like you're like, "Ooh, dark clouds. Let's go. He'll never know." This idea is a little bit problematic on just the philosophical/biblical level, but is it ironic that if you turn to Psalm 22, it would say, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?...They have pierced my hands and feet...They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." And the very end of Psalm 22 it says, "It shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation; they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn, that he has done it." Could it be that Jesus on the cross is saying, "Here we go."

And then you've even got the great commission. Matthew 28:18-20, "And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always."" From this moment, Jesus gives them this command, all the apostles and disciples run back up into the upper room, lock the doors and they just begin to pray. Now go to Acts 2. The apostles, disciples, followers of Jesus are upstairs in this upper room, and they're praying and praying and praying and they're scared. The Bible says that tongues of fire fall, everybody begins to speak in a tongue and now these guys that were scared little rats beforehand are all of a sudden unbelievably emboldened. So they walk out into the square in Jerusalem, and Peter gets up and says, "Men of Israel..." And he begins to proclaim the gospel. And because of Passover, there were Jewish men and women from all over the Roman Empire. As Peter spoke, all the men heard what he was saying in the dialect of where they were from in the Roman Empire. So they were hearing what Peter was saying in different languages and it freaked them out. The Scriptures tell us that in that day 3,000 men became believers in Jesus Christ and the church began. We're at a problem here if what God said He was going to do in Abraham is going to take place, because those 3,000 are Jews. There is not one Roman, there is not one Greek, there is not one gentile. They are all Jews. And the church begins to grow and grow and grow with Jews.

Now in Acts 10, we have a man named Cornelius, who is a part of what we simply know as the Italian Cohort. I just like to think it's some kind of Italian special forces. He is a commander and high up in the Italian Cohort, and he is a God fearing man. He's not a Jew, he just thinks there's a God. An angel of the Lord shows up and with a great deal of detail the angel speaks. The angel says to Cornelius, "In Joppa there is a man named Peter who is staying with his friend Simon who is a tanner, but not the one on this side of town, the Simon the Tanner next to the ocean." And then he tells Cornelius, "Go get him. Send your soldiers, grab him and bring him to your house." Now as the soldiers approach Simon's house in Joppa next to the sea, Peter is up on the roof praying in the sixth hour. And he has this vision of this sheet that comes down from heaven and inside of it are all these unclean animals that the Jews would never touch. And as the sheet was lowered, God said, "Get up Peter; kill and eat." Peter goes, "I've never touched what's unclean. In fact, I haven't even touched what's uncommon. No way." God says, "If I made it, it's not unclean." And it lights Peter up, because he doesn't know what it means. The text literally says, "Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean." As he's thinking on what's happened, there's a pound at the door and Cornelius' soldiers are there. They grab Peter and say, "We're taking you to Cornelius' house." Peter says, "I'm a Jew, you're a gentile. That's not happening...Wait a minute. A sheet, dirty, dirty-clean. Whoa. Okay, one second. I'm bringing some of the boys with me because I'm a Jew and you're a gentile and I'm not supposed to be in your presence because I'm better than you. But let me bring the boys because something might be happening here." And then they travel to Cornelius' house.

They get to Cornelius' house and Cornelius says, "I've brought you here because I had this vision from the Lord." And Peter goes, "I only came because I had this vision from the Lord." So then there's this really awkward stare off. Now from there, Peter goes, "Alright, let's see." And he begins to share the gospel with Cornelius, his family and the whole household. And in the middle of the sermon, the Holy Spirit falls on Cornelius and his entire family and they begin to speak in tongues. And Peter looks back at the rest of the Jews he brings with him who are like, "Uh oh, this

wasn't supposed to happen." And then Peter was like, "Well, if God's given them the same Spirit He's given us, is there any reason we shouldn't baptize them today?" And a couple of the Jews were like, "Because the rest of the Jews in Jerusalem will murder us." And then Peter was like, "Give me some water." He baptizes Cornelius' household, and before they get back to Jerusalem word has already spread that gentiles had received the Spirit and there was this huge blow up in the early church. So they get back and they're demanding, "Did Cornelius and his family get circumcised?" Peter's like, "The dude's 42. The new sign of the covenant is baptism, it's not circumcision. It's being filled with the Holy Spirit and being baptized by water. That's the new sign of the covenant. It's no longer circumcision. Our hearts are circumcised by God. No longer do we need just an external circumcision to mark us as God's children." And this huge theological "Do they have to become Jews?" debate breaks out among the early church. It was the first crisis of our faith. Now by Acts 15, Saul has become Paul and just doesn't care. He's like, "Let them argue. Come to Christ...come to Christ...come to Christ...come to Christ..." So the Council of Jerusalem occurs in Acts 15 and the church, although very tense, says, "Gentiles are a part of what God's doing. Gentiles will be a part of God's plan in Christ to reconcile to Himself the entire world." That happens in Acts 15, which is around 39A.D.

And now let's just talk history. In 42A.D., Mark goes to Egypt. In 49A.D., Paul goes to Turkey. In 51A.D., Paul heads to Greece. In 52A.D., the apostle Thomas heads to India. In 54A.D., Paul heads on his third missionary journey. By this time he's writing the book of Romans, and he says that wherever he goes, gentiles will do the Law. He's saying that in every culture that he goes to, there's this objective evidence of the gospel. The gospel doesn't sound crazy to them. He shows up in these cultures and says, "God has a Son," and they go, "We knew God had a son because there's a sun and a moon." So he's saying, "God has written His Law on the hearts of all men so that no matter where we go, people come to know Christ in a powerful way." In 174A.D., the first Christians are reported in Austria. By 280A.D., there's the first written knowledge of rural churches emerging in northern Italy. Let me tell you why that's a big deal. Christianity, for the first 200 years, was completely urban. It was not rural at all. In fact, the word "pagan" basically means someone outside of the city. So Christianity was completely an urban religion. And then by 200A.D., we start having rural churches. By 350A.D., 31.7 million people claim Christ as Lord. That's roughly 53% of the Roman Empire. In 432A.D., Patrick heads to Ireland. We celebrate this every year by getting smashed and pinching one another. In 596A.D., Gregory the Great sends Augustine and a team of missionaries to what is now England to reintroduce the gospel. The missionaries settle in Canterbury and baptize 10,000 people in the first two years. In 635A.D., the first Christian missionaries arrived in China. In 740A.D., Irish monks reach Iceland. In 900A.D., missionaries reach Norway. By 1200A.D., the Bible is available in 22 different. In 1498, the first Christians are reported in Kenya. In 1554, there are 1,500 converts to Christ in what's now called Thailand. In 1630, there is an attempt made in El Paso, Texas to establish a mission among the Mason Indians. In 1743, David Brainerd starts a ministry and a mission for American Indians. In 1845, the Southern Baptist Convention organizes its mission board.

In 1869, thirteen people form the Holford Prairie Church, where Old Hall Cemetery is now in McGee Lane. By 1882, the church had grown from 13 to 37. They leave what was nothing but prairie land and come into the city and form First Baptist Church of Lewisville. In 1962, First Baptist Church of Lewisville wanted to try to reach the pagans on the outskirts of town and founded Lakeland Baptist Church, which not sits right off of I-35. In 1978, Ben Smith, the pastor of Lakeland, decided to reach the heathens of Highland Village and planted Highland Village First Baptist Church. In 2002, Highland Village First Baptist Church became the Village. In 2005, the Village planted a church in Little Elm to reach the pagans there. In 2006, the stench of the sin in Keller was too much to take, and so we planted CityView in Keller. In 2007, through a series of prayer and fasting, God gave a campus to the Village Church in Denton, Texas.

On and on and on I could go. What I gave you was a remedial, cursory, sad, small broad brush stroke of all that God has done in Christian history to get you and me in this point, in this place, and all of it goes back to exactly what was said in Genesis 12, exactly what was promised in Genesis 20, exactly what was spoken of in the prophets, exactly what was

said in Jesus Christ, exactly what occurred in the New Testament. It continues to push itself forward over and over and over again. This is history, this is what's going on. Every government, every war, every plague, every bit of persecution, everything that has ever occurred in every corner of the world exists for one reason alone – God's great gospel. It pushes and drives everything. Do you know how the gospel left Jerusalem? Stephen was martyred. Do you know how Christianity got here? The Puritans were being persecuted. So they hopped on a boat and came over. Everything is about what God is doing. This is what you're caught up in. This is what's happening. We're right in the thick of it. This is the story of creation. There is no other story. Every other story is a footnote in this story. And if you go back and look at it historically, you can find how it pushed, played and exalted this story. And lest you think I'm culturally biased, if present trends continue, then by 2025 there will be 633 million Christians in Africa, 640 million Christians in South America and 460 million Christians in Asia. And I didn't get these numbers from a believer in Christ. In 1900, there were 558 million Christians on planet Earth; by 2002, there were 2 billion. This is what's going on. This is the story of planet Earth and the universe if finds itself in. This will continue to press forward. If you'll see this, if you'll get this, if you'll understand this, if you'll understand where you are in all of this, then the little details of life don't toss you all over the place. If you can see yourself as what you are, a bit player in God's story, then in dark times you know God's got this and somehow this plays into what God's doing. In great times, you're going, "This is what God's doing. It plays into how God is playing this thing out." If you can see this, get this, grasp this, then you're tethered, then you're anchored, then I think you're much more apt to play your part well. This is history. 1440B.C. is when the first document was written. It's not when it happened; it's when it was recorded, some 6,000 years of this happening exactly like He said it would.

And then here's the funny thing. We're so flippant and arrogant as Americans. We're watching this really cool thing happen, we're watching the world shift. We're a generation that's literally watching the world shift. For the last 100 years, the United States of America is bedrock, world policing, economic power. We are the show. And that's shifting right now, isn't it? Asia is a dominant power, India is a dominant power, South is a power. You've got these other nations that are rivals. And then you've got preachers on television going, "If we don't repent, we're going to be second stage..." It's like, "Dummy, we've always been second stage." God has been using nations for His plans and His purposes since the beginning of time itself. When Christ returns is He coming to Manhattan? Is Christ coming to SoHo going, "I'm here! Worship Me, you peoples of the earth." Is that how it's going down, in SoHo? Upper West Side? L.A.? Please. The Bible will tell you that it's going to shift. It's got to shift. This is not an American story. We are a people among peoples, and there will be one shepherd, there will be one people. This is what you find yourself caught up in. I don't know what you thought of the last election, but you shouldn't panic. We're so polarized in our culture where you have one group that's celebrating and then other places that are building bunkers and stockpiling weapons. It's this really weird thing right now. But according to my Scriptures and yours, God places men in office. God's not going, "Oh no! I'm going to need a huddle here. What are we going to do about the economy in the States. I mean, we all know I love them more than any other people group on earth. So what are we going to do about that? Did you know that some of them can only afford one television? We're going to have to do something. Holy Spirit, this is on You. You need to get down there." You can giggle, but that's exactly how we think. While the whole world burns we just keep buying trinkets.

So here's where we go from here. Here we are caught up in this giant wave, this giant thing that God is doing. Next week I want to ask a few questions. This is what's going on, now who is the church? Who makes up the church? And we're going to talk about that at a universal level. There's one holy church, and we're going to discuss who it is. And then I want to talk about the church local. Like here's a great question: Is it biblical for you to belong to a local church. There's not one verse that says, "Join a local church." So is it to belong to a local church. We're going to talk about it. And I'm not only a pastor but I'm an elder here with these other elders. What should expect of us? How do you judge whether or not we're doing our job well before God and before you? What is our job? What does it mean to be a member of a local church? Are there any expectations that the Bible puts on you? What does it mean to be this community of faith? These are all questions I think we have to answer, because this great deal of confusion. But all of it plays out in what God is

doing. The Scriptures say that when there is this church within every people group on earth, when there are those from every tribe, tongue and nation that call Him Lord, at that point there will be a new heaven and a new earth, the city of God will come down and *shalom*, rhythm is restored.

Let's pray, "Father, I thank You for our time together today. I thank You for these men and women, and I thank You for what we're caught up in. I try to just think back on all the thousands and thousands and thousands of details that have played out so that You might call me to You, so that You might call these men and women to You. It hurts my head to think that in 1860 there were 13 people who said, 'God needs to reign over this place.' And then they handed the baton to their children and other people who came to know You, and then they passed it off to the next generation, and here we are. We're in this room because of that. We thank You for the work You've let us do in Africa, the work You've let us do in China, the work You've let us do in Guatemala. We thank You that there is no disjoint in what You said what You were going to do, what You've done and what You're doing. We thank You that You've let us be a part and that You called to Yourself. I pray this will enable us to play our parts well. Help. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen."

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