

TRANSITION:

PAUSE FOR TECH LEADER... Good morning Church! If you have a Bible/Bible App and I hope you do; open it to two places this morning. *Genesis chapter 12 verses 1-3* and *Genesis chapter 15*... Before we unpack those together, let me remind you of 2 things: **First**, TOMORROW @ 5pm at Andrew Sq Station, is our **Southie Neighborhood Prayer Meeting**. Outside, socially distanced, mask wearing, and lasting no longer than an hour/if that. And the reason I'm inviting you to join is not only because, of course, prayer is a good thing, BUT because it's not something we're starting. Rather, it came about because an official from the Mayor's office approached me and asked if we would meet once a month, to pray, in different Southie locations to, in his words/quote, "*strengthen individuals' and families' during this time of crisis.*" Now, I'll just let you in on a little of our philosophy of ministry as a church: When a secular city and it's government officials ask YOU if you'd pray for it, you say yes!... So... I hope you'll join for that tomorrow!... **Second**, Easter/coming up on April 4th. And given the circumstances this year, what we're gonna do to celebrate is 2-fold: **One**: Meet online like this for a time of worship and teaching. We'll be continuing our "True Myth" series that day with an OT passage that's a really beautiful depiction of what Jesus accomplished for us in His resurrection. But then **Two**: Weather permitting and AFTER gathering online, we're gonna meet up at Marine Park off Day Blvd to... just hang out! No agenda other than enjoying each other... BUT there is a pre-req for attending/actually 3: **1) That You Bring A Friend** - We're just gonna be hanging out and it'd be great for all of us to get to know each other's friends and neighbors, ESPECIALLY on such a special day. So make an invite. If they don't come. No problem. But at least make an invite! **2) BYO Chair/Blanket and Lunch**, since it'll likely NOT be summer weather and WILL be immediately after gathering online, when most of us are hungry, but for safety reasons, don't wanna be sharing food together. And then **3) Bring a Donation** - Every year as a church we give to what's called the Annie Armstrong Fund. It's a denominational fund in which 100% of all that's given goes to supporting new church planting efforts across the globe. WE as a church, are recipients of this offering! And in previous years we've given to it as a part of our Advent Missions Offering. This year we're doing it for Easter. Cuz ya know we've said this often: *God's Plan A for reaching the world with the incredible news of Christ IS the local church. And there's no plan B.* And so WE wanna be of that plan! So... what we're gonna do is simply setup a table at the park after Gathering, where, when you arrive, you can come with your smart phone and in a safe/touchless way, scan a QR code that lets you give on the spot - \$1/\$5/\$1000/whatever you feel lead to give. And obviously you're welcome to give BEFORE Easter by simply going to hubchurchboston.com/give and choosing the "**Easter Missions Offering**" dropdown, but at the very least, ON EASTER, we'll be doing that together. Ok? Ok!

PASSAGE READING > TEXT:

Let us hear the reading of God's Word together: **Sara C Intro's Self > Genesis 12:1-3; 15...**
Thanks Sara... Many of you know that a couple years ago my family and I moved into a new/or I should say, really old/but new for us, home. And as a result needed to do some work on it. So we went through the whole process; contractor, crew, blueprints/the whole thing. And towards the end, we find out that the toilet in our downstairs half-bath, had been installed not just off-center,

but basically up against the wall. And I'm not like a huge aesthetics guy. Abby's much better at that than me, but given that it's the bathroom that EVERY guest in our home uses, I didn't want folks feeling like using the restroom was, ya know, akin to being a caged animal. So...I approach the crew and ask em what's up, and they give me a bunch of architecture talk that BASICALLY telling me that it was just cheaper and quicker for them to do this weird, off-center toilet thing... Now, those of you that know me, know that I am NOT always right, BUT I'm rarely in-doubt. So very I confidently approach the crew ask em to fix it, at which point they tell me I'm gonna have to fork over a ton of money. ***So what would you do?***... Well, by God's grace/and it was God's grace, cuz again I know NOTHING about this kind of stuff. The extent of my handiness is Legos and Lincoln Logs as a kid... But by God's grace Abby and I had a contracted blueprint of the bathroom. So I pulled it out, showed it to our Project Manager, at which point he said, "*Uh, yeah we'll get that fixed free of charge.*" Here's why I share that story: If you don't wanna find yourself stuck with an off-center toilet...or better yet, an off-center LIFE...ya gotta have a blueprint... ***Genesis 12 and 15*** give you the most important blueprint you can have: **God's Blueprint for Salvation: Where He has, not just been taking the world since the beginning of history, but where He wants to take YOU, AND How He's gonna get you there!**

Cuz let's remind ourselves of where we are IN the story: You remember in our first message of the series, we saw that the Bible is not simply a collection of our thoughts about God, but rather the inspired collection of God's thoughts about Himself, to us. God revealing Himself to YOU, in hopes that YOU would tie your story to His... Which as we then saw in ***Genesis 1***, begins by tying your meaning, purpose, love, and hope up in Him, understanding that as Creator, ALL life is found in Him and there's no life outside of Him... But then two weeks ago you recall, in ***Genesis 3***, we saw that unfortunately, you and I/and every person suffer from kind of ingrained "Me'ism" - a spiritual disease if you will, that began with our ancestral parents, Adam and Eve, and like DNA has gotten passed down to us, so that we now seek NOT to make God the point of life, but OURSELVES the point/"Me'ism," which of course is not only at the root of all the sin and suffering in the world today, but something, as we also saw, God is committed to eradicating through sending one would ultimately "*crush the head of the serpent.*" That's what we've seen!

Now, some of you have already noticed that we've skipped a few chapters today. And that's BECAUSE if you were to read those chapters, what you'd see is that they're all about the spread of "me'ism": In ***Genesis 4*** it spreading from Adam and Eve to their kids, Cain and Abel. In ***Genesis 6-9***, spreading to the rest of mankind, such that God had to reboot humanity, as it were, by means of a global flood. - Crush the hardware of creation and wipe the software of humanity... only to find that in ***Genesis 10 & 11***, as humanity repopulated through Noah and his family, the disease of "me'ism" was still there - The hardware'd been re-worked and the software re-booted, but the FIRMware was still corrupted... ***Was that nerdy?***

So when you get to ***Genesis 12*** here, what you're supposed to be feeling is, that "Project Humanity"¹ as one person called it, is an utter failure!... You even see it in the mention of Abram/

¹ ""Treasure and Trust: Genesis 12," in J. D. Greear Sermon Archive (Durham, NC: The Summit Church, 2017)

Abraham here in Genesis 12 - take a look - cuz if you were to read the end of *ch.11* you'd read about Abe's family/supposedly the people of God, now living in a place of idolatry, under the assumption that they too had become idolaters! Abraham's dad, a guy named Terah, according to *Joshua 24:2* and other extra Biblical sources, not only worshipped idols, but had a family business selling em!² Not to mention, Abraham here is childless. So there's not a lot of hope that "the next generation" will get it right. Cuz there is NO expected next generation. What you're supposed to feel here in the beginning of Genesis 12 is that "Project Humanity" has failed!

EXCEPT...that God AGAIN shows up: *v.1*, "*Now the LORD said to Abram*"... You remember, after Adam and Eve sinned and failed, God lovingly came looking for em and gave em the first promise of Jesus?... Here too, God lovingly comes looking for this childless, pagan idolater and also gives Him a SECOND promise of Jesus, saying that He'll make Abraham and his family's *name great*, by making THEM *a blessing to the whole earth* IF Abraham'll TRUST Him... which - and commentators are unanimous on this - is a foreshadowing of God bringing Jesus the Messiah through the lineage of Abraham! God gives this incredible promise, to of all people, Abraham, and simply asks him to trust... *because, friend with THIS God, you're never as lost or hopeless as you think...there's ALWAYS grace!*

Now turn over to *ch.15* where God ratifies His promise with a covenant... Cuz here was the truth for Abraham AND so often for you and me: Just because God promises, doesn't mean we always take Him at His word does it? I mean when God gives us the "what" of some promise ya know, what's our first inclination? To ask for the "why" and the "how" right? "*Ok God, thanks for promising to bring the Messiah through my fam, but why do I have to leave? How are you gonna direct me?*" Right? We doubt!... So too Abraham.³ Which is WHY God begins His covenant by saying in *v.1*, "*Abe, Fear not...*" See that? Abe is doubting God's promise. And not just generally, but specifically, because in the chapter before this, Abe has just rescued his nephew Lot, from a bunch of tribal chieftains, who he's afraid are gonna retaliate against him. So he's thinking, "*God I know you said you were gonna bless the whole world and bring your salvation through my family. But in case you've forgotten, ma family is basically nomadic at this point; there's a hit out on me*" AND, as he says in *vv.2-3*, "*I'm STILL childless.*" My only possible heir is "*Eliezer of Damascus*" - who was a servant - so not really a viable heir... Abe is saying, "*God I have doubts about you*"... ***Which off the bat, should tell you: God welcomes your doubts.*** Now, He's not gonna let you stay in those doubts, but He does invite you to bring them to Him.

Cuz notice what He says next: He answers Abe saying, "*Eliezer's not gonna be your heir. You're gonna have a son coming from your own body (who) will be your heir.*" And then being the perfect teacher, He takes Abe outside and gives him an illustration saying, "*Look up at the heavens and count the stars - if you can.*" ... "*So shall your offspring be.*" - which is God's way of saying, "*I'm not just gonna give you one child. I'm gonna make you the father of countless generations, by bringing the Messiah through you.*" He assures Abraham, so that in *v.6*, "*Abram*

² https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4529921/jewish/Who-Was-Terah.htm

³ Understanding of Abe's doubts as explained in this section largely adapted from insights in "Abraham and the Fire - Theophany: Anticipations of Jesus in the Old Testament—July 3, 2011 - Genesis 15:1–21 - Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

believed the Lord, and (God) credited it to him as righteousness.” - Abe took God at His word and God deemed him righteous because of it. ***Cuz that’s what righteousness is: It’s that posture of life in which WHAT God says, is what YOU believe and live by!***

So you following flow here? Abe’s got these doubts about God > God assures Him > Abe believes Him...And then...like 5 seconds later, cuz the Bible’s extremely realistic about our human condition...Abe says **v.8**, *“O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?”* meaning the land God’d promised in **Genesis 12**. And at first glance it looks like Abe’s just reverting back to previous doubts right?...But if you look closer, what’s ACTUALLY happening is NOT that Abe’s continuing to doubt God, but that he’s now begun doubting HIMSELF! Cuz remember: When God made that Genesis 12 promise, it came with a condition: *“Abe, you gotta trust Me and go to the land that I’ll show you.”* So no doubt, Abe’s looking at himself and going, *“I don’t know if I’ll come through on that. I mean God, you called me, a childless man, out of a pagan family, steeped idolatry, while having a hit on my life. My “resume” doesn’t exactly smack of future success here.”* He’s not thinking, *“How will I know that YOU’LL come through God.”* He’s thinking, *“How will I know that I’LL come through - that I’LL obey you well enough to possess your promise?”* He’s doubting himself! - ***You ever been there? Of course you have/we all have: Cuz most of us come from one of two contexts:*** Either a more religious/maybe more conservative context in which doubt is considered weakness and something to get rid of OR a more secular context/maybe you grew up in Boston or a city like it, where it’s almost cool to not just have doubts, but doubt everything right? It’s like a virtue to question everything...But the problem with the former is, if you can’t be honest about your doubts, because you always gotta get rid of em, you’ll never get answers...But TOO, if you doubt everything, cuz ya know, you just wanna breezily move in and out of every thought or idea without ever committing to anything, you end up being unrooted. You’re like a human tumbleweed - “free” but free to be blown about by anything.⁴...The Bible says that doubt is neither a “no-no” to be eradicated or a “virtue” to be embraced! Your doubts today, are an invitation for you to enter God’s presence and have Him re-order those doubts by His Word!

Cuz if you look at the rest of **ch.15**, that's exactly what God does for Abe. You see He constructs a kind of theatrical contract, complete with animals and visions and all kinds of things. And I say theatrical, because remember, this is not a written culture. It’s an oral one. And in oral cultures, you don’t have DocuSign and attorneys and what-not. So what you did to make contracts back then is you ACTED them out. Specially and as Tim Keller says, *“You acted out the consequences of not obeying the contract...what was called the curse of the covenant.”*⁵ And a very typical way to make a covenants back then was to cut animals in half, walk between the pieces, and basically say, *“If in the future, I don’t do everything I’m saying I’ll do today, may I be like these animals...cut into pieces.”* It was very vivid, but intentionally so, because in acting it out, everyone would see everyone else’s role and all be on the same page...So God’s saying, *“Abe,*

⁴ Insight on how different contexts deal with doubts adapted from “Abraham and the Fire - Theophany: Anticipations of Jesus in the Old Testament—July 3, 2011 - Genesis 15:1–21 - Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

⁵ “Abraham and the Fire - Theophany: Anticipations of Jesus in the Old Testament—July 3, 2011 - Genesis 15:1–21 - Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

you want assurances? Fine we'll make a contract."...Now let me ask you: Put yourself in Abe's shoes: If your problem is not only doubting God, but doubting yourself, does a contract really help? No! Cuz it still presumes that you'll uphold your end of the deal, but that's why you're doubting in the first place right?

So here's what God does/and it's utterly amazing/you gotta see this!...Abe has this aisle of dead animals spread out right, and as **v.12** says, the sun is setting, and so Abe falls into a deep sleep. And it's obviously not a normal kind of sleep, cuz it says, *"a great and dreadful darkness came over him."* See that? It's not just getting dark outside. It's getting dark INSIDE/a kind of spiritual dread coming over Abe...during which, if you read **vv.13-16**, you see God reiterates His original promise, BUT with more specificity this time.⁶ But THEN/here's the key: **v.17** it says, *"When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between the pieces."* *"Fire pot and flaming torch"* - Those are symbols of God's presence, because often in the OT God's presence is symbolized by fire: Burning bush with Moses; pillar fire with Israel, Elijah calling down fire, etc. It's God's presence. And so what does God's presence do here? He walks between the pieces, and as **v.18** says, *"makes a covenant with Abram..."* So who walked? God! Who didn't walk? Abe! And what do we have? A Covenant!

So you say, *"that's all very confusing. What does it mean?"* It means two things: On the one hand, God is not just reiterating His previous promises. Ya know, *"Abe, I'll give you this, and I'll do that for you;"* He's actually saying, *"If I DON'T give you everything I told you, and DON'T do everything I said for you, may I be torn to pieces. May I be cut off. May I die."* ...But on the other hand, He's saying too, *"Abe, I know you're doubting me. I know you're doubting you. But guess what this isn't about you. It's ALL about me and what I'M going to do! How I'm going to bless YOU even if it means ME being torn to pieces. How I'll not only pay the penalty if I'M not faithful to the covenant, BUT I'll pay the penalty if YOU'RE NOT faithful...because your faithfulness has nothing to do with this unconditional salvation!"* ... You see? Oh my gosh!

And of course, we KNOW, that this is exactly what God was saying, BECAUSE it's exactly what would later happen to Jesus...who **2 Corinthians 5:21** says, was, *"for your sake"/your salvation, "made to be sin, who knew no sin, so that IN HIM (you) might become the righteousness of God"/Jesus torn apart on the Cross, like an animal, so that YOU can be deemed as having ALWAYS taken God at His word/ALWAYS upheld your end of the contract. Amazing!*

SUMMARY:

So let me pull this together and show you the Blueprint for Salvation we have here and what it practically means for us today: There's 2 aspects of God's salvation/the Gospel serve as the foundation for the rest of the Bible: **First**, that God's Salvation is obviously... **FOR EVERYONE:** In many respects, these passages are so striking, not just because of what's in em, but WHO they're to. Abraham! This guy, who ultimately became a founder of the Christian faith is a nobody! A childless, pagan, idolator, who frankly is never really resolute in his faith. If you

⁶ <https://www.esv.org/Genesis+15/>

read the rest of Abe's story in Genesis, you see that he's really a pretty fickle dude/even goes so far as to basically traffic his wife Sarah with a pagan king, cuz he's afraid that when the king she's how good looking she is, he'll kill him in order to get her. So he says, "*take her. She's my sister not my wife.*"...And yet, THIS is the guy through whom God brought Jesus and salvation! Why?...Because in the economy of God's Kingdom, salvation is not for a segment of the population, ya know the cleaned up, well-to-do, have-have-it all-together, slayin' life types. No! It's FOR EVERYONE...No wonder Jesus was called in **Luke 7** and **Matthew 11**, a "*friend of sinners!*"...So practically, this means two things: **One**, Friend, it doesn't matter who you are, what you've done, this salvation is for you! And you say, "*Pastor, but you don't know what I've done.*" I don't have to. I know what Jesus has DONE for you! He's "*Come*" as **John 3:17** says, "*into the world, not to condemn the world, but in order that the world/You might be saved through him.*" It's for you!...But then **Two**, practically it means that for those of us who enjoy this salvation together: We oughta be the most hospitable community in the city! Ya know, constantly inviting folks into our lives, and not just when it's convenient, but when there's ANY opportunity! In some senses, we oughta be a church defined by our willingness to welcome the "unwelcome"...AND THEN, cuz of course, that's bound to be messy - THEN, never cancelling anyone out no matter how messy it gets...And you know what I mean when I say cancel:⁷ I mean when you remove intention from somebody's words or actions because you only assume YOUR perception. So thinking that you get to "x" someone out of your life, because you perceive something about them to be too negative, REGARDLESS of their intent. And of course, I'm not referring to physical, sexual abuse/those kinds of things. I'm referring to the kind of cancel culture in which we live, where even if you didn't mean to or even if you did, but realize you made a mistake, if you offend me in some way, I get the right to "x" you out! You understand, that is simply a modern version of ancient, pagan religion in which the "unclean" - however you define "unclean" is banished and put outside the camp. No! If God's salvation/the Gospel is FOR Everyone, then EVERYONE is invited in. And those of us who've been invited in oughta be constantly inviting in and never cancelling out others! The Gospel's FOR EVERYONE!

But **Second and Finally**, it's accomplished BY ONLY ONE. The whole story of Genesis 12 & 15 is really the story of GOD doing everything to secure salvation and Abraham doing nothing... And you understand, that's not just the story of Abraham; it's the story of the Gospel! The Gospel is not about what you have to DO to get to God and be saved. It's about what Jesus has DONE for you! That's why we say that, "*salvation is not spelled D.O. but D.O.N.E.*" - Jesus dying and rising for you NOT when you've cleaned yourself up or made yourself presentable or achieved, but as **Romans** says, "*while you were yet a sinner and an enemy of God.*"...You gotta see how unique this is. I'm not exaggerating when I say that there is no other religion on the face of the earth like this, because religions, you understand, either have an impersonal god/a force something, who could never do something like die on a cross and rise from the dead to declare God's dealings with your sin "*finished.*" OR they have a god, but who WOULD never do that because it's offensive for God to die. This is totally unique...Again, no other faith or practice even comes close to saying that it doesn't matter how much of a failure you are. If you enter into

⁷ Understanding of Cancel Culture adapted from <https://itunes.apple.com/WebObjects/MZStore.woa/wa/viewPodcast?id=1000270128470#episodeGuid=aca4cfad-a312-4160-99f3-bae2f90ff538>

a covenant with God through faith in what Jesus has done for you, you're saved by grace/it's sheer grace. It has nothing to do with you. You don't have to "walk between the pieces." You don't have to take an oath. You don't have to clean your life up, progress in life, be better at life, any of it...because God took it all on Him. There's nothing else like this. Every other religion or philosophy says, "Do this or do that, and God will bless you." Only Christianity says, "God came and DID this and DID that, SO THAT He could bless you unconditionally"⁸... Which incidentally, is why not everybody receives it and even those who do have such a hard time with it. Because our performance? It's taken out of it. We're taken out of it. And we love to be at the center, even get offended when we're not...But this is grace, which by definition means, undeserved, not performed for. It's utterly unique and should amaze you because you have nothing to do with it...Which means, practically, THIS AND ONLY this, oughta be at the center of our lives, individually and as a church! - THIS salvation that's FOR everyone and accomplished entirely BY God has to be your center and ours...***Is this what's at the center of your life? Is this your blueprint/your anchor? Ya know, the thing you can look to and say, "because I have this, I not only know where I'm going, I'm safe. I can be happy. I can rest." Or do you have another?***...And real quickly, ya know how you can tell? **2 Ways: One**, you have an increasing willingness to let God have all of your life. You're willing to "go to a land that He'll show you," as it were. Or to say it another way: There's no room in the house of your life that's closed off to God!...But then **Two**: You're more-and-more loving and accepting of all kinds of different people, because you know that salvation is FOR everyone...In other words, you love God and love others, which is perhaps why Jesus said that the foundation and outcome of the Gospel is that YOU would "love God with your whole heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself." **This is God's Blueprint for your Salvation** - what He wants for you and where He's taking you, if you'll let Him! **Will you?**...**Take a minute to think about that...**

//////////////////////////////////// AUDIBLE //////////////////////////////////////

PRAYER:

TRANSITION:

For the sake of time, we're gonna to forgo our normal Breakout groups today. But having thought about this question, I invite you spend some time with it in your respective Missional Family Meetings this Week, as that's really where we have opportunity to not just contemplate or discuss important questions, but apply them together, in community and in view of the Scriptures. So I hope you'll connect with your Missional Family and if your not connected to a Missional Family Meeting, let us know so we can help you get connected to one near you!
, after which we'll move into a brief time of discussion and application. Take a minute...

SENDING:

*In the meantime, Church as you are SENT into your week, receive this blessing from the NT Letter of **Titus 3:4-6**: "When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he*

⁸ "Abraham and the Fire - Theophany: Anticipations of Jesus in the Old Testament—July 3, 2011 - Genesis 15:1–21 - Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy... through Jesus Christ our Savior, (ESV) ” Go in peace rejoicing in and liberally sharing the salvation which God has accomplished FOR You in Jesus Christ. Thanks. You are Sent Together!

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APPLICATION:

At this time we’re gonna move into breakout rooms for just 10 minutes, so that you have a chance to not only think about that question, but BEGIN applying it together with others in your Missional Family...If you’re not connected to a Missional Family, no worries - we’d love for you to just remain here and connect and ask questions if you have em...But after 10min discussing the question that’s gonna be put onscreen **NOW**...we’ll re-gather back here for a sending blessing...Ok? Ok! We’ll move into those breakout rooms now...

- ***This Sunday’s Application Questions: On a scale of 1-10, 1 being “not at all” and 10 being “as much as Jesus Himself,” how much would you say your life is built upon God’s blueprint for salvation?***
- ***CHARLIE BREAKOUT: Welcome > How Connected > Q&A/Abridged Covenant Card Share***

SENDING:

Hey, Welcome back! I hope you’ll take the discussion that got started there and continue it this week within your Missional Family Meetings, as that’s REALLY where we’re invited IN to apply and live OUT the Scriptures together.

But in the meantime, Church as you are SENT into your week, receive this blessing from the NT Letter of **Titus 3:4-6**: *“When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy... through Jesus Christ our Savior, (ESV) ” Go in peace rejoicing in and liberally sharing the salvation which God has accomplished FOR You in Jesus Christ. Thanks. You are Sent Together!*