

If you are a guest, my name is Rick and I serve as lead pastor here at Christ Fellowship. Open your Bibles to Genesis, chapter twelve. We are going to wrap up this series on the life of Abraham. While you are turning there, let me get us started in the right direction by this. I did some reading this week, believe it or not, I did some reading on Lake Okeechobee. I did this because I'm not sure we realize what a blessing that lake is to us in South Florida. Get it: Lake Okeechobee resides a little more than a hundred miles north of Miami. It is the seventh largest body of fresh water in America, and it contains over a trillion gallons of water.

Now, check this out: Lake Okeechobee receives its waters from above. By that I simply mean, as the rains fall down from the heavens, Lake Okeechobee receives those rains and then contains them within the shoreline of her waters. It kind of reminds me of that passage in James 1:17 which says this: It says "Every good and perfect gift is from above, and it is coming down from the Father." Even the rain is a blessing that comes down from God. Get it: Year after year as the blessings of rain fall into Lake Okeechobee, again Lake Okeechobee receives those blessings and then contains it along the shore lines.

Folks, here is what I love about Lake Okeechobee. That is this: Lake Okeechobee does not quarantine the waters that it receives to itself. No. In fact, Lake Okeechobee channels some of its water down to the Everglades to resource all of the Everglades with life-giving water, and it also channels some of its water all the way down to the city of Miami and resources us with life-giving water. Think about it: Life can only exist as it does down here because of the flow, because of the channeling from up there. Aren't you glad that Lake Okeechobee is a channel and not a bucket?

By the way, it seems to me that God made kind of a deal with Lake Okeechobee. It seems like God is saying, "Lake Okeechobee, if you will continue to let the blessings flow down to the people of Miami, if you won't dam this thing up here and you will let the blessings channel all the way down and be a blessing to the people of Miami, if you will do that I will just keep resourcing you with more and more water. I'll just let the rains of water keep falling down on you. We might say that God continues to bless Lake Okeechobee because Lake Okeechobee continues to be a blessing to us in Miami. Now, let me turn a corner and draw an analogy to that, because what an image of Christ Fellowship. You say, "What do you mean?" Well, just this: I don't even have to tell you that God has blessed this church in incredible ways. Year after year God is just continuing to rain down His blessing on Christ Fellowship. But, here is what we know, and this is my proposition to you today. Here is what we all know. God blesses us so that we can be a blessing to the people of Miami. Let me say that again. God has

blessed Christ Fellowship so that we can be a blessing locally to Miami and globally to the rest of the world. In other words, just like God rains down water into Lake Okeechobee so that Lake Okeechobee can channel it down to the people of Miami, just like that, God has blessed us so that we can take what He has blessed us with and channel it, not bucket it, not dam it up, but channel it to the world, both locally and globally.

What I want to do today is remind you of two treasures with which God has blessed us; treasures that God has entrusted to us, and that He wants us to channel to the world around us. I want to show you how you are doing that in such a great way. I hope this message is an encouragement to you. I hope it is an affirmation to what is going on at Christ Fellowship. I want to do that by having you go back one more time to this man's life, by the name of Abraham. Genesis 12:1. I want to welcome all of our campuses that are joining us today, as well as those who are joining us online. It is because of your faithfulness we are able to do things like serve those who are not able to be here, but can be with us online. So we are glad for that.

I want to give you two thoughts about the blessings of God. Number one, God has blessed us with a message. God has blessed us, God has entrusted us with a message. As you are going to see, He did that same thing with the nation of Israel. With that in mind, let's pick this up again in verse one: Genesis 12:1. The Bible says, "The Lord said to Abraham: 'Go from your country, your people, and your father's household to the land I will show you.'" We talked about that last week. That is the land that is called The Promised Land. It would be the nation of Israel that God was telling Abraham to leave and go to that land. Watch what He says to him in verse two. (2) "I will make you into a great nation." As you already know, that nation was the nation of Israel. Abraham was the father of the nation of Israel.

Now watch what God says about this nation that Abraham would father. He says: "I will bless you and you will be a blessing." Translation: "Abraham, I'm not just going to just bless you, but I'm going to bless the nation that you are going to father. That is the nation of Israel." And folks, what was it that God blessed Israel with? How did God bless them? Well, one of the blessings was that through the Israeli people would come the Messiah; would come the Christ. That is one way. But another way that God blessed the Israeli people was that He gave them the Word of God. He entrusted to them. It is like He was saying, "Here is my Word. It contains my mind, and my heart and my plans for the human race, and I'm going to entrust this message to you people."

What was God's goal for entrusting the message to them; for handing them the Word of God? Simple: God wanted them to take the message of the Word of God and channel that message to the rest of the world. In other words, God was saying: "I want you to receive the message, like Lake Okeechobee, and I don't want you to hoard it, to dam it up, but I want you to channel that message to the rest of the world. And if you do that: Verse 3: "And all peoples on the earth will be blessed. And how are they going to be blessed? Through you."

As you channel that precious message to others, the whole world is blessed.

Christ Fellowship, that is the message. That is the promise that God makes to us. In fact, God has blessed us, that is Christ Fellowship with the message of life. In other words, we have the message of the gospel. God has entrusted that to us, and why has God given us the message of the gospel. Listen: The same reason He gave it to Israel. God gave Israel the message, but they could not hoard it but channel it to the rest of the world. By the way, if you know anything about Israel's history, you know they were less like a channel and they became more of a bucket. By that I mean, when God gave them the Word of God, rather than channeling it to the rest of the world, they reservoired it. Rather than channeling it to the rest of the world, they didn't want anything to do with the rest of the world. They hoarded the Word of God to themselves, and the effect was that God had to abandon Israel. He had to abandon them as the channel of the message to the world. He had to abandon them as the hope through which the message would be spread. God had to start over with a new movement of God and that movement of God would be called the Church.

Christ Fellowship, God has entrusted his Church, that is us, with this Book, with this message. Why has He given us this Book? Why has He entrusted us with this message? We are called to channel the gospel message to the world. In other words, we will take this message and channel it to the world and let it flow. In other words, don't hoard it, but let it flow like out of a trough. Here is what will happen. The same thing that God said could happen to Israel. Verse 3: "All the peoples on the earth will be blessed through you." Do you realize that we have the opportunity to be a blessing to the world for all peoples through us? We will become a channel. But sadly, many churches, if not most churches are not channels of the gospel. They are like Israel. They have become buckets of the gospel.

You say, "What do you mean Rick?" I mean churches for the most part gather inside the four walls of the church. They give lip service to the Bible. They talk about the gospel. They pray about the gospel. They have great conversations inside the building about the gospel. They sing about the gospel. They preach about the gospel. They

argue about the gospel. They have fights over the gospel. But they don't do what the gospel says they are called to do and that is to channel the gospel to the rest of the world. As a result, they sit and they soak and become like a stagnant bucket of sour water, totally un-useful to God. In fact, churches like that are less like Lake Okeechobee and they are more like the Dead Sea. You say, "What do you mean?" Well, if you know anything about the Dead Sea you know it exists in the southern tip of Israel and just like Lake Okeechobee, the Dead Sea receives its water from above, specifically from the Jordan River. It comes down and flows into the Dead Sea. However, rather than channeling this water out and sending it to other places to resource those places, rather than doing that, the Dead Sea dams up the flow and becomes a bucket, becomes a reservoir. The effect is it is so stagnated that nothing can live in that body of water. I've waded into it. It is stagnant; it is nasty; nothing can live in there, nor can that Dead Sea produce life.

I don't want to be too harsh here, but what an image of so many churches. They receive the blessings of God. They have in their possession the holy Word of God, but rather than channeling it out, and spreading it out to other people, they just keep it and contain it. and reservoir it, and quarantine it inside of a church. Consequently they cannot produce life, and they become totally dead in the eyes of God.

Now folks, enough of the bad news. I'm saying all of that because this is what I love so much about you. This is why I love being the pastor of Christ Fellowship, because you refuse to be a bucket, and you made a formal commitment to channel the Word of God to Miami, to Dade County and to the rest of the world. We made a formal commitment. You did: Remember? We put a banner up here about a year ago and you came up here, and I came up here, and we said, "We're not going to be a bucket. We're going to be a channel to the rest of the world and we are going to reach locally fifty thousand people, and we are going to reach globally fifty thousand people. Christ Fellowship, listen: That's why God is blessing this church. It's because you have made a commitment; you have resolved to be a channel.

There are times when a church like ours, there are churches all over America that will call us and say, "How are you guys doing this? You are in this city called Miami that is so unbelieving, that is so lost, that is so unchurched, and yet you are reaching so many people in that city. What is the secret sauce? What is the secret that you guys have?" I just say, "It is no secret. We have a lot of people who are determined; who are like Daniel; who are resolved that they are going to be a channel of the Word of God. Christ Fellowship, listen: I am convinced that as long as we keep the gospel flowing, if we don't dam this thing up inside these walls; as long as we keep it flowing from us; as

long as we are starting new campuses and we are planting new churches, and we are serving this city and loving this city, as long as we keep it flowing and God blesses us and continues to bless this city and bless this world, I'm convinced God will continue, like Lake Okeechobee, just pour down the blessings. I'm equally convinced that if we ever dam this thing up and enclose it and we become internally focused on ourselves, and we stop letting our love and the message flow to this world around us, I'm convinced God will shut down His blessings on us.

By the way, what I love about you, Christ Fellowship, you don't just give lip service to the mission that God has given us. You don't just talk about it. You back it up with your wallet. You back it up with your purse. You back it up by giving because you know in your heart that the mission that God has given to us, to reach this city, is a pipe dream unless that mission and vision is resourced financially; unless it is fueled financially. In fact, listen, you show me a church where the people receive the blessings of God financially, and after they receive the blessings of God, you show me a church where they funnel some of that that God gives them to God's work, to God's heart, to God's vision, you show me people who do that and I'll show you a church that can be powerful, that can be a movement of God in the city. Transverse: You show me a church where the people receive God's blessing and bucket those blessings, and they don't channel them to God's work, and I'll show you a church every time that struggles to be a movement and that struggles to advance the gospel. This is what I love about you. I hope you feel encouraged. I hope you feel affirmed that God is using you. God has blessed us with a message, but number two, God has blessed us with resources. You see, I don't even have to tell you that American Christians have been blessed. Amen? The problem is that American Christians sometimes tend to be so out of touch with the rest of the world that they don't know how blessed they really are. Let me help you out: If your total family income is \$49,080, you are richer than 99% of the rest of the world. If your family income is \$23,080 you are in the top percentile of the richest people in the world. Get this, as of this Friday night, the world's population is 6,359,256,483 people. If you have food in the refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof over your head, and a bed to sleep in, you are richer than four billion seven hundred and sixty-nine million, four hundred and forty-two thousand, six hundred other people. Folks, my point is that poverty is rife in other parts of the world, yet we are blessed. That raises a question doesn't it? Why have we been blessed? Why has God blessed us? Well, here is the answer.

When God blesses you financially, God blesses your finances, you have a financial blessing. God has blessed America. God has blessed churches, and God has blessed

families so that we can be a blessing. It's like verse 2 says. "I will bless you and you will be a blessing." Again Christ Fellowship, I'm just bragging on you to tell you how much I appreciate you. That is why if ever a church calls me and says: "Would you like to come to the Carolinas and pastor?" No! Never! Because I love pastoring you. One of the reasons I love you so much is because this is a church that does not dam up the resources that God has given to you, but rather this is a church that channels what God gives you, to this work, so that we can do what God has called us to do. Listen: because you channel what God gives to you, we are able to be a blessing to the city of Miami. We are able to be one of the few churches in this city that the city actually says, "We are glad you are here. You are a blessing. Because of your generosity, this church is not just able to say to the city of Miami "We love you". We are able to show them love. We are able to give them tangible love, which by the way, softens their hearts so that we can channel the message of the Word of God to them.

Listen, because of your faithfulness to give, we have been able to start seven campuses. Do you know why we start campuses? We start campuses because that is how we keep the flow of the Word of God from getting quarantined inside of a building. We just keep spreading it all over this city so that they can find out about the love of God. Because of your faithfulness not to bucket what God gives you but to channel it and to let it flow from you. Because of that, we are going to plant fifteen churches that won't be Christ Fellowship, that won't have this logo. I don't know what kind of logo they will have, but we are going to resource them financially. We are going to take our money and give it away to them. Why? Because we want to be channels of God's blessings. I can't tell you how many pastors have called me and say, "We don't think you ought to be planting churches near your church because people might leave your church and go to the church you plant." Who cares? We are not trying to build Christ Fellowship. We're trying to build the Kingdom of God. I'm telling you, if we just keep letting it flow, who cares? If we keep letting it flow, I'm telling you, God will continue to bless us. I trust God on that.

Because of your generosity, listen: We are able to love this city through Caring for Miami, which is an arm of this church. By the way, when I say "Caring for Miami", do you realize that is not some organization that we support. Caring for Miami is you. It's you. We just didn't name it Christ Fellowship. We did put the initials in it: C-aring F-or Miami. We stuck that in, but I want you to realize that when you hear Caring for Miami, we are resourcing people and loving them and caring for their health and physical needs, that is you. That has your finger prints all over it.

Because of your generosity we are able to partner, to have strategic partnerships with churches all over the world. In fact, one of the things we are going to be asking you to do this Christmas is we have strategic church partners that we partner with in India. But one of the things we are going to do this year is that we are going to dig, resource them, fifteen wells in India, where there is no water coming up out of the ground. It is polluted and they get into it and they die. We are going to dig fifteen wells. This is what I love so much: When people come to that well, they are going to see the name of a church on that well. Do you know what the name of that church is going to be? It's not going to be Christ Fellowship. It's going to be the name of that church in India. Now, secretly, you are behind it, right? You are throwing the money at them. You are resourcing them. But when people walk up to that well, and I'm telling you, you are going to have people of all different kinds of faith. You know, Hinduism, Muslim, walking up there. They will say, "I've got water to drink because of this church." They will realize that that church loves them. They are going to hear that Jesus loves. The way that happens is because you are not taking credit, but giving away to resource them. You will get the credit later when you stand before God and He says, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Because of your faithfulness we are able to do these things. We are kind of between Thanksgiving – "God thank you for what you have done for us. Thank you for how you have blessed us. It's Thanksgiving and we are looking forward to Christmas when we want to give to God. It is His birthday that we celebrate. Give! I want to challenge you to open the flood gates this year. Along with your regular flowing, your giving regularly as God gives to you, I want to encourage you to open that dam a little bit more. We want to raise over four hundred thousand dollars this Christmas. We are going to give it all away. Some of it will stay here in Miami, and some of it will go overseas. We are going to give it all away

Listen to this: II Corinthians 9:11. "You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God."