

Sermon Transcript from February 28th, 2016 Israel: The Kingdom Begins Again Pastor Dave Lomas, Bridgetown Church

Has anyone heard about Airbnb? Have you guys ever heard about that place? So, have you ever seen any of the Airbnb commercials? Have you ever seen those? Oh my gosh. They're magic. Actually, they're genius, and I use that word very loosely. But, they're really really good. There's the first one that they came out with a couple years ago called "Is Man Kind?" Do you get it? Is man kind? Get it?

So, it's like this Terrence Malick kind of commercial, if you can even do that, and he did. It's like a baby walking towards this glass door – and the baby's not really walking, it's like stumbling. And it's slow. You can see from behind he has just a diaper on and it's this voiceover and it's this baby walking towards this door. And the voiceover says, "Are we good? Is man kind?"

And then it says this. I think this is so good: "Go see. Go look through their windows so you can understand their views. Sit at their table so you can share their tastes. Sleep in their beds so you can know their dreams. Go see and find out just how kind the he's and she's of this mankind are."

And then it ends with the baby touching the door and you're like, "I want to rent a house from someone. I want to go to someone's house."

And it just does that thing. Like, you're like, "That is it. I want to do that."

It's compelling. It's so good. I want to see how mankind is, and so I want to rent and Airbnb. Then there's this other commercial called "Never a Stranger." You might have seen this one. It's a gal who visits all these wonderful places all over the world and is thanking everyone in a note that she's writing, somewhat. She's reading it out loud. And she says, "Thank you for allowing me to share in your perfect homes."

And it's going all throughout the world and sharing all these different homes and these experiences. And she says, "When I was at your home, I felt like I was at home and your friends became my friends. No, they became like, for me, family."

And then it ends with her saying, "Thank you for sharing your world with me. It feels like home."

And you're done watching this commercial and you're like, "This is it. This is compelling."

And it's compelling because this is the way that we want our world to be. This is how we want to travel. We want to travel in a world that's interconnected and it's full of shalom. It's full of peace, this interconnected shalom. And that's what we want. We want to walk into someone's house and it's like, "Come into my shalom." It's like that. And we wish that the world was like that.

But then there's this HomeAway commercial. Do you guys know what HomeAway is? HomeAway is like you rent a whole house out. They made a commercial to answer Airbnb's commercial, and it's amazing. I'm just going to show it to you. It's the voice of Ron Swanson from Parks and Rec, so it's already amazing. But, just watch this. This is it.

[Video]

Sharing is caring. That's what they told us. Now we'll share anything. Our personal details. Our personal space. Even our vacations. You didn't travel 2000 miles to share a pool with that guy. That's your pool. That's a shared pool. Your evening. Shared evening. Yours. Shared. Yours. Shared. Shared. Definitely not yours, and all yours. It's your vacation, why share it? Book the whole house at HomeAway.com.

[End video]

That is so brilliant. So brilliant. It's funny. The reason why it's funny is because it's true. See, Airbnb is tapping into something that we all want. Like, go home and Google the Airbnb commercials. This is tapping into something we all want. We want this interconnected community of shalom and home and there's some part deep down in us that we watch

the Airbnb commercials and think, "That's the way it's supposed to be."

But, what the HomeAway commercial does is tapping into reality. That is the way things are and it freaks you out. You're like, "I will never rent an Airbnb again."

Like, it freaks you out. If you've ever rented an Airbnb and had a one bed experience, you know that sharing is not caring. Like, a home – I stayed at this one Airbnb and there was blood on the sheets. Not joking. That's just the grossest thing. And she said it was rust. I'm like, "No. That's not rust. It's blood."

Anyway. So, I've had some really good ones and I've had some really bad ones. We all long, all of us long – don't think about that too long. Please. Just don't. We all long for a world of Airbnb, but we know that we live in a HomeAway world full of back hairs on the bar of soap and blood on the sheets – well, I did it again. Sorry.

I think these two commercials are actually what the Bible is trying to do in the first 11 chapters. We're created to be in this interconnected world of shalom where man is truly kind. Shalom is being in a community with all relationships, relationship with God and with other people, with self and with creation and it's ordered and it's flourishing as God designed it. It's harmonious. It has this interdependent, brilliant function. And I would argue we all know this.

All humans are born with a collective memory of that good shalom. We all want it. That's why we work for it. That's why we long for it. That's why we hate it when things are out of whack. We're almost haunted by this shalom of God. We all have this collective memory and we want it all back. That's why we make commercials like the Airbnb commercial, because we want that shalom back. But, we know that we live in a world that's broken. And sin, as we learned last week from John Mark, has disintegrated everything.

Where everything was integrated and whole and connected with God and with us and with each other. Where our bodies were integrated with themselves where our bodies didn't turn against themselves and things like cancer, and now everything is disintegrated. Where we're disintegrated from our environment and with God and with ourselves and with our friends and with our family and we're messed up.

Last week, John Mark taught about The Fall and when sin entered the world through humans, betraying the trust of God. He quoted from this brilliant book by Francis Spufford called "Unapologetic." You should read it. It's so good. In "Unapologetic," Francis Spufford – and John Mark quoted it to you guys first, so I can say this – said he defines sin as "the human propensity to 'F' things up."

The human propensity to "F" things up. Everything. We have this thing in us. And it's this human propensity and we all share in this propensity. But, the question is, at the end of chapter 11 of Genesis, what is God going to do about it? Because, when you're reading this, it starts great. One and two of Genesis starts great. Then you get to chapter 3 and all the way to chapter 11, this thing comes spiraling down hard and you're wondering, "God, how are you going to redeem this thing?"

We all share in the fact that this world is messed up. Kendrick Lamar has a song that he won a Grammy for a couple weeks ago off his album "To Pimp a Butterfly," and the song is called "Alright." And in this song, I think Kendrick Lamar would agree with Spufford's definition of sin. This is what Kendrick Lamar says in his song at the beginning of "Alright." He says:

"I'm F'd up. Homie, you F'd up..." – but then he says this. This is so good. – "But if God got us, then we're gonna be alright."

I believe the story of Israel is like this last piece that Kendrick Lamar says. It's a story of how God has us or has humanity. Like, the world is messed up. In Spufford's words, the world is F'd. I am. You are. We're all. The whole world is disintegrated. But, God somehow has not given up on humanity. And the story isn't the way that we would expect it to go. The story, at the end of chapter 11 and chapter 3, is "how in the world is God going to get humanity out of this mess?" Why is God still committed and is God still committed to this messy world?

And the answer doesn't come at the end of chapter 11. The answer doesn't come in silver parachutes like Hunger Games sponsor gifts or something. That would be awesome. If you're reading the Bible and then after the Tower of Babel it's like, "Boop boop," and

these little things came down. Right? That would make sense. Like, God sends salvation down from above and then everyone opened up the salvation balm and rubbed it on their little hearts and everybody's like, "Oh, I'm healed," or whatever.

That is what we wish would happen. If you've read Genesis 1-11, you're like, "Why? God, send those little silver parachutes down and we're all saved."

But, that's not how God makes the world alright. That is not how God delivers the world. The answer comes from God called a human. God calls a human. The answer comes from God choosing one family from this scattered, rebellious nation. Post Tower of Babel, everyone's scattered and everyone's speaking a different language and everyone's pagan, or not worshipping Yahweh.

God is looking for someone to reboot the story. He's looking for someone to save the world through. And that's what we get in Genesis 12, what we just read. I want to slow down here because I want to be super clear. I won't assume that you know what I'm about to say. So, bear with me because, if you don't get this, the whole Old Testament will confuse you more than necessary, because it already does. It's already confusing. But, it will confuse you more than what is necessary. Listen to this.

Here's a question: what is God doing in the first two chapters of Genesis. What is He doing?

The answer is this: God is creating a good world full of harmony and beauty and potential where humanity, the image-bearers of God, are to take up their vocation and co-rule and create with God. That is what God is doing in Genesis 1 and 2.

Here's the second question: what is God going to do from Genesis 3 on? After The Fall, after we've broken trust with God, after we've trusted the serpent's word and questioned God's Word, after that, what is God going to do?

Here's the answer: God is trying to redeem the world back to shalom. And, in order to do that, He will use humanity. God is trying to redeem the world back to shalom and, to do that, He will use humanity. This point is really explicit in the Bible if you read it. However God is going to save the world, it will be through humans. God is going to save the world, God wants to save the world, desires to save the world, but He will use humans. It will not be by bypassing humans being responsible. It will not bypass our choice. It will not bypass our freedom. God desires to collaborate with humanity. It's always been like that from Genesis 2.

So, here's the question again: what is God trying to do from Genesis 3 on?

The answer is this: God is trying to redeem the world. What is God trying to do in the Old Testament? What is God after to do in the Old Testament? God is after redeeming the world. How is God going to do that? The answer is through humanity, specifically through the family of Abraham.

So, if you get lost in the Old Testament somewhere, remember this. Here's your guiding light back home: what is God trying to do?

The answer is: God is trying to redeem the world. How? Through humanity, specifically through the family of Abraham.

So, when God commits Himself to Abraham in chapter 12, God is committed to Abraham so that God can save the world. This is huge. God is committing Himself to Abraham so that, through Abraham, He can save the world. It is not that God is not committed to the rest of the world. But now God is committed to the rest of the world through Abraham and his family. God still loves the world and He's going to love the world through a family. And this is why it's so important that Abraham believes God and obeys God and Abraham's family believes God and obeys God. God will use Abraham and his family's involvement in the process of redemption.

So, let me drill down on this really quick. Let's drill down into Abraham's story real quick to see how God is trying to save the world through this family. Look at Genesis 12 again. It's on the screen. Genesis 12:1-3. Now, it's impossible to exaggerate the significance of the promises made to Abraham. It's impossible. If we miss what's going on in Genesis 12

right here, we miss the key that unlocks, I think, the entire rest of the Old Testament, maybe even the Bible. This is so huge. First of all, notice that there's a lot going on here. But, notice what God said He would give Abraham and why.

He said, "I'm going to give you a land."

Go to the land that I will show you, because God wants to give Abraham a land. Okay? He also wants to give Abraham a nation. He wants to make him and his offspring become a nation. Or, He wants to multiply his descendants. He wants to give Abraham His presence. This is why God keeps saying, "I will. I will. I will. I will bless you. I will do this. I will do this."

God also wants to bless the world through him. So, listen. God wants to give Abraham into a land. He wants to make him a nation. He wants to be with him. And, through these things, God is going to bless the world or save the world through Abraham and Abraham being a light or a blessing to the world. God wants to save the world and He will save the world through Abraham. God gets committed to Abraham. He ties himself to Abraham and He's like, "I'm going to save the world and I'm going to bless the whole world. I'm going to give you a land, I'm going to give you a nation, I'm going to give you my presence and I'm going to bless all the nations through you."

That's huge. But, notice this word "blessing" keeps coming up over and over and over again. There's a book called "The Drama of Scripture." It's this wonderful book on the story of God from beginning to end. And, in the book, the authors say this:

"The dynamic word 'bless' expresses God's purpose to give His creatures all they need to fulfill their lives in His creation as He intends for them. The word 'curse', by contrast, expresses God's awful judgment on His creatures when they rebel against His purposes for them."

Notice how "blessing" and "cursing," now, for the entire world, have to do with Abraham. So, God said before, even in Genesis, that He's going to bless the world and that if you don't obey, if you don't do what I say, if you eat from the tree, there's going to be a curse upon you. Now, all of that focal point comes into Abraham and now Abraham becomes the source of the world's blessing and the world's cursing. There's even that verse that says, "Those who curse you will be cursed."

It's like, all of a sudden, the way that the world responds to Abraham is how God's going to respond to them. It's like the center of activity of what God wants to do in the world, both blessing and cursing or judging, is not placed on this one man. See, from Genesis 3-11, we see an occurrence of this word "curse" over and over and over again. God's curse or God's judgment on humanity's sin. And what the curses meant from Genesis 3-11 has meant a loss of freedom, that we've lost our freedom, that we've been alienated from the good land or the good earth, the Garden of Eden, the way that we were meant and placed at the beginning.

We have hostility towards one another. We have moral and spiritual shame. And God's repetition of the word "blessing" over Abraham is deliberately set in opposition to the repetition of these curses. So, what God's doing is, through Abraham, He is going to undo the curse. And that's what this means. Through Abraham, God is reversing the affects of judgment on creation. "I'm bringing you into a land. I'm going to bless you and I want to bless the world through you."

And though sin has brought God's curse on creation, God is still at work to recover His purpose for blessing all that He's made. So, at this point you're going, "Okay, no pressure Abraham. That's a lot of stuff."

And Abraham's like, "Okay."

I mean, this is a lot for one person to bear. But, this whole idea that God wants to do all of this stuff through Abraham is part of the problem. Abraham is just a man full of flaws himself. This is not God looking down to find the most likely to succeed candidate. He doesn't look down and go, "Abraham. He's the one who's going to succeed here and I'm choosing him because he's the one who is the best out of everyone."

That's nowhere in that text. Abraham is full of flaws and he's like really old. I mean really old. He wasn't like young and strong and some indie singer/song-writer like King David

was. Like, he's old. And he was old and he had no kids. God's like, "I'm going to make you a nation."

He's like, "But I'm old."

He's like, "I know. You're going to get older before I even start doing that."

And he's to be the father of a whole nation and he was a pagan who worshipped some sort of false god. We're not sure what, but he wasn't a follower of Yahweh at this point. Like, God chooses this flawed individual to save the world through? What is going on here? But, Abraham believes God at really crucial moments in the story. But, he's filled with doubts as well. He sells his wife twice. Twice. I don't even know how you get away with that.

Like, if I did that to my wife, she might have a conversation that goes something like this the next time we go into the King's palace: "Remember that last time you sold me as your sister? Let's not do that again."

Something like that. But, he does it twice. And I mean, to be honest, this is just the signs of things to come for Abraham's nation. When Abraham becomes a nation, all of their historical story is repeated failure after failure with a little bit of success sprinkled in. Abraham would have a son, Isaac, who ironically sells his wife, too, to the same guy, Abimelech.

Did you read that? You're like, "Whoa."

No warning there. Mom didn't say don't do that? Dad did it? Okay. This is weird. Isaac would have twins and then one of them would be Jacob, who ends up having a lot of kids with several women. And that story is an utter train wreck. If you learn anything from reading the Bible narratively, it is that idolatry and polygamy never end up well. Those two things are never good. Just read it narratively.

Jacob would be renamed Israel and he would have sons and they would be the head of 12 tribes, the 12 tribes of Israel. So, at the end of Genesis, we see God fulfilling one of His promises. At the end of Genesis, Abraham has a lot of people. He is given a son and that son has a son and that son has a lot of sons and those sons have a lot of children. And they are numerous. Okay, God. God has fulfilled one of His promises to Abraham.

But then you read in Exodus. You start with Exodus and Israel has a lot of people, but they are not a nation, they don't have land and it doesn't seem that God has a close relationship to them. So, you open up Exodus and you're like, "Okay, well one of these promises is fulfilled. God has given them a lot of people. But, they're slaves. And they're not in the land. And God's not really with them, it seems like. They're slaves under Pharaoh, who does not know Yahweh and fears that Israel is getting too big. So, he oppresses them and he enslaves them."

Then it says, "God remembers His promise to Abraham and sends a deliverer to bring Israel out of slavery so that Israel might worship God, might be in relationship with God."

And God crushes Pharaoh who is seen in the story to be the worst person in the Bible up to this point. And then Israel is in the wilderness and God gives them plans. And here's the thing: God gives them plans so that God can live among them. God wants to tabernacle among Israel. He wants to dwell with them and live in their midst. Now, at this part of the story you're like, "Oh my gosh. Look. They're a people, they've been delivered and God wants to live in the middle of them. This is part of the story again. This is part of what God promised to Abraham."

And this is where we have to stop and realize something here: God has made Israel a huge people, He desires to make them a nation, He desires to make them a kingdom of priests it says in Exodus 19, and give them their own land so they become a true nation so they can become a light to the world that all the nations on the earth might be blessed through them. This is why they were delivered from slavery. This is why Israel was given the law and the tabernacle and this is why Israel is told to obey and get into the land.

All of this was not necessarily just for Israel, it's for the world. God wants Israel to obey so He can get along with redeeming the world through them. Now remember, God is trying to save the world through this nation. If they would just believe God and trust God, they

would be a nation of priests, a kingdom of priests to the nations through their obedience to Yahweh. But, do they do it? No. Not entirely as a people. There are some who are faithful, some who are trying to live out the righteous implications of obeying God. But on a whole, the whole nation typically rebels.

Over and over again they complain. Right now we're kind of right in Deuteronomy and over and over again they are complaining. They actually break every single Ten Commandment right after they get it in one party. Do you remember that? Like, "Here. Don't do all these things."

And they do all of them in one party where a golden calf pops out of the fire. They're like, "The one who delivered us!" And they're worshiping this thing and God's like, "Okay. I'm out. I can't do this."

Moses is like, "Remember your promise."

He's like, "Alright. I'll remember my promises."

Like, God wants to restart all over with Moses. He wants to start all over with Moses. And this golden calf story? This is, by the way, a true story. A real story. Like, they literally worship a golden cow and they say, "Holy cow, you've saved us. You've delivered us."

Like, they really did that. That's like... that happened. And Moses is up on the mountain a few feet away getting instructions from God. They can see the fire on the mountain and they're doing this. And this story here, you're supposed to see the entire nation of Israel can be told through this golden calf story. God is right there and they don't believe Him and they worship false gods over and over again. They won't trust God and they worship false gods. They disbelieve and they can't actually get into the land. God judges them and waits a whole generation before He takes them into the promised land. They finally get into the promised land through Joshua, and they're finally in the land. You're like, "Okay, good. God brought them into the land."

Which is depicted, if you remember, as like a second Eden. It's flowing with milk and honey with laws that govern how they are to live in that land. And now, they're finally able to be a light to the nations. They have a land, they have the people, they have the presence of God in their midst. And then do they do it? No. You get the book of Judges and we see that they actually just become like the Canaanites and everyone does what's right in their own eyes and, most horribly, they worship the gods of the Canaanites.

And over and over again, God holds them and gives them up to their enemies because of their disobedience. And the book of Judges reads like the book of Genesis 3-11. It tells the story of the spiral down into rebellion and disaster in every level in the nation of Israel. Then you get the book of 1 Samuel which opens up with the story of a barren woman. Her name is Hannah. And to bare a nation that's called Israel with wicked priests, Eli's sons and how Israel's enemies capture the Ark of God, which is the manifest presence of God. So, listen: Israel is in the land, but now God has left and God is living with the enemy.

You're supposed to go, "Oh my. Are you kidding me? They finally get into the land and then the Ark is captured?"

They're like, "Now God's gone. Great."

They're in the land. Look, this is amazing storytelling, by the way. It's like back and forth. God is trying to redeem the world through this people and they keep disobeying until finally, God is literally captured by the enemy in the Ark and they're like, "Ah, we've got the Ark."

And an angel's like, "Aw, man. They've got the ark. Where's God now? God's not with us anymore."

And that's how the story's supposed to read. That's how bad it is. And then Samuel is born into Israel's story and Samuel becomes the last judge, a priest and a prophet and Samuel will eventually anoint a very young shepherd boy as king of Israel who will establish Israel as a kingdom under God and whose son will be Solomon and who would build a temple and a palace in Jerusalem, which is also called Zion, and they would sing all these songs about Zion and how God is in the middle. And God fills the temple under Solomon.

It almost must seem as though Eden has been recovered, because God is among His

people in a "permanent temple." The monarchy of Israel appears to have brought peace and prosperity more than Israel has ever seen up to this point in time. And now, finally, when you're reading at the end of Solomon's life, now perhaps Israel can draw the nations to God, right?

Nope. Solomon introduces all kinds of pagan worship into Israel through wives he takes after his death. The kingdom is torn in two. The northern part called Israel is so wicked, is so full of unbelief and rebellion to their part of the covenant, their vocation to the light of the world, that God eventually judges them and wipes them out.

The southern part called Judah, where Jerusalem is, has some good and some bad kings, but eventually is judged by God and taken into exile into Babylon. So now, at the end of this story the land is gone, the temple is torn down and the people are scattered. Are you kidding me? From Abraham all the way up through Solomon, God has been trying to establish this nation to be the light of the world because He wants to save and to bless the world. And they keep worshipping false gods. They keep disobeying their vocation over and over and over again until finally they're out of the land, the temple of God is torn down and everyone is scattered.

But, through the prophets, God promises Israel that she will be back into the land and that there is one who comes with healing in His wings to restore the nation and bring Israel into a new covenant so that they can have new hearts to truly know and serve God.

So, here's the question: why doesn't God just start over with a new people group? Why doesn't God go, "These people. I can't even," or something like that. That would be a great title. "I can't even." God's just like, "I can't even."

Or, why doesn't God just drop down salvation like silver parachute sponsor gifts or something? Why is God constantly trying to redeem the world through this stubborn people? In Genesis 12, God promises Abraham that He would make him a great nation. And then, a story that's not often recounted, in Genesis 15, God binds Himself to this promise. God calls Abraham and says, "Abraham, I'm going to bless you and I'm going to make your nation great and I'm going to bless the whole world through you.

And then in chapter 15, God does this thing – this really bloody scene in Genesis 15 – where God has Abraham cut all these animals in half and then lay them in half on each side of each other. So, there's like this really bloody isle with halves of dead animals all the way across the side. This was a common covenant in these days. This is what this covenant meant. They would literally, two people, walk shoulder to shoulder through this pathway of dead animals. And this is what this covenant meant. This covenant meant, "May this be done to me if I break this covenant. May I be torn into two. I'm vowing myself to you and, if I break the terms of this covenant, may this be me. May I be torn in two."

In Genesis 15, God is binding Himself to Abraham or Israel through a covenant. And a covenant is no joke. The closest thing that we have to covenant today is marriage. The church that I serve at, they always ask me to open the premarital class and, to be honest, I tell me church this, I hate doing it. They always ask, "Can you do the very first teaching? Because the first teaching is on covenant."

It's always the Debbie Downer. Like, everyone in the whole room is buzzed. Like, "We're getting married. This is going to be so fun."

And I walk in going, "You're saying 'yes' for the rest of your life. And you can't get out. And it's serious and it's sobering and you can't get out. You are binding yourself to this other person and no matter what happens, you can't get out."

That's what a covenant is. And I go, "Welcome to premarital class."

No one's talking and I go, "My goal is, by the end of this time, you're like, 'Maybe I shouldn't be married.' Then I've done my job. I talked you out of it. But, if I cannot talk you out of it, know that this moment in your life, this small little moment at 25-28, or, in my city, 34 years old, this one really small moment in time you're saying 'yes' to someone no matter what they turn into for the rest of their lives."

They're like, "Whoa. I never... calm down."

But, that's a covenant. The best definition that I've ever heard of a covenant is this. I heard a pastor say this just, actually, a couple of months ago. "I will be to you as I should be, whether or not you are as you should be to me."

"I will be to you as I should be, whether or not you are as you should be to me."

That is a covenant. We don't have a royal couple in America. The closest that it gets for us is Jay Z and Beyoncé, and they have a song together. They have a song together off of Jay Z's album and it's about marriage. They're rapping and singing about marriage. They have this line in the song alluding to they share tattoos under their wedding rings of the date that they were married.

They have this line that says this: "This ink don't come off even if rings come off."

I love that line. This is what they're saying. They're saying that no matter – I mean, obviously. I'm not saying that they're saying this, but this is what they're saying. I'm not saying it'll happen, but this is what they're saying. They're saying this: no matter what we're fighting about – because, you know, when you fist fight, you take your rings off because you don't want to break your fingers. It's true. They do.

So, no matter what we're fighting about, if we take our rings off to box or if we want to take our rings off and not be married anymore, we can't. Because rings come off, but this ink don't come off. That's what a covenant is. Do you understand? That's what a covenant is. Like, "I want out."

Well, you can't get out. You can't. You're bound to me. God enters into a covenant with Abraham. But, in a twist of events, God puts Abraham into a dreamlike state and He walks alone through the middle of the carcasses. God binds Himself to Abraham, to Israel and the world through Israel.

See, first off, what's going on here? First off, let me tell you what this doesn't mean. This doesn't mean that Abraham doesn't have any obligations to God or the call to be led to the world is lessened. That is not. I mean, basically, Israel's obligation is mostly what the Old Testament is about. What's going on is that God is saying to Abraham, and thus to Israel, "I will be to you as I should be even though I know you won't be to me as you should be."

God is saying, "I'm committed to saving the world and I'm committed to saving it through your family. And I am binding myself to that promise. I will save this world and I will save this world through your family. This ink or this blood don't come off even if rings come off."

That's what God is saying to Abraham. That's commitment to setting the world right. And the reason why Old Testament is so long and so storied is because God is saying, "I vowed to do this and I will do it."

And God will use Israel. God has not forgotten His promise. God will renew Israel and then draw all nations to Himself even if He Himself has to step into Israel's vocation and take on the sin of the entire world Himself. But, that's next week. I'm not allowed to get in there.

I want to close with a story that a friend of mine told me a few weeks ago. It's a story of the massive earthquake that happened in Armenia in 1989. An 8.2 magnitude earthquake that rocked Armenia to where all of the buildings were flattened. And really, the story hinges on this dad and son relationship.

The dad, his son's name was Armand, and he would drop his son, Armand, off at school everyday. And he would tell him, as he was about to get out of the car to leave, "Armand, I will always be there for you."

That's what he said every single day. "Armand, I will always be there for you."

So, when he showed up to school after the earthquake to see the school as a pile of rubble, with nothing but his bare hands, Armand's dad started to dig and dig. He started pulling off bricks and pieces of wall plaster and then, while everyone else stood around him and people actually even said to him, "Forget it. They're all dead. What are you doing? They're all dead."

He looked up to a couple of them, flustered, and said, "You can grumble or you can help me lift these bricks."

A couple people pitched in but, for the most part, they gave up when their muscles started to ache. But not Armand's dad. He couldn't stop thinking about his son. So, he kept digging. He dug for hours. He dug for 12 hours and then 18 hours and then 24 hours and then 36 hours straight. Then finally, on the 38th hour of digging straight, he heard a muffled groan under a piece of wallboard. He pulled back the board and he yelled out, "Armand!"

And, from the darkness, he heard this trembling, shaking voice, "Papa!"

And then all these other voices started crying out as young survivors started stirring beneath this rubble. That day, they rescued 14 of the 33 students who were still alive in there. What Armand said to his classmates that were still surviving when they found him is, "See, I told you my father wouldn't forget us."

This is a perfect picture of the God of the Old Testament. God does not give up on His promises. God continues to go after Israel because He continues to want to save the world through them. And this is the faith that we need. We need this kind of faith that this is the God we serve. That God will be there for us. This is the kind of Father that we have. Let's pray.