

Genesis 17:3-7, Genesis 25:7-8 Abraham and God's Covenant

Epiphany 4 Jan. 31, Feb. 1, 2010 (Children's talk – We sometimes feel alone, but Jesus is with us)

Grace and peace are yours from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ Amen

God's Word about Abraham is written in Genesis 17:3-7, Genesis 25:7-8

These are Your Words heavenly Father to keep us close to You until we join You in heaven. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear Friends, in Christ,

This is the conclusion about the life of Abraham, a man of faith. Today we'll see the importance of God's promises to him, a covenant promise that would last not only to the end of his life, but into eternity. Our theme is:

Abraham and God's covenant!

First, Abraham needed a covenant of grace. Abraham was familiar with covenants. Archeology has provided historical writings from Abraham's time. Business transactions were covenants. Cities made covenants with other cities for defense. A king would write a covenant to grant a servant a gift. It was unconditional, not depending on the receiver. This is type of gracious covenant that God used with Abraham. God promised to do all the work as the giver of the covenant. In Gen. 15 God called Himself Abraham's "Shield", which was another name for a king. In Gen. 17 the Lord called Himself "God Almighty," the Protector and Provider of blessings so Abraham and Sarah could have a child. Nothing was impossible for God. (v.1-2) Why did God make a one-sided covenant?

It was because Abraham and all people since the fall of Adam and Eve have been sinful. If a covenant with God depended on us in any way, we would all be lost. We would never benefit from the covenant. We have the world's temptations and our sinful nature presenting ways different than God's way. Think of Abraham. God promised him many blessings and the coming Savior through Abraham's promised child. Abraham and Sarah tried to have a child, but after many years, they gave up. Instead, they followed the customs of the world; Sarah had Abraham conceive a child through her slave. Nine months later Ishmael was born. But, Ishmael was not God's solution or a part of God's promise. Centuries later his descendents would be bitter enemies of the people of Israel. By trying to play God rather than wait for His timing Abraham and Sarah brought hardship to generations of people.

We, too, can think that we are doing God a favor by doing more than His Word tells us or we lag behind by not being willing to follow His commands. God's ways are not our ways by nature. Our thinking does not begin to comprehend the plans of God. If God should allow hardships or sickness, it is so easy for us to complain rather than trust in Him. We just want to get over a problem, but He has us wait! God has reasons for what happens in our lives just like He had for Abraham. Rather than turn to our own way, we need to have a humble faith to accept God's promises and pray fervently so that we receive God's help in His time and way! That is why God made promises to us.

We have been called by God in Christ to be His own people. How faithful have we been? Jesus commanded that we make disciples of all nations. Have we whole-heartedly been supportive locally, nationally, and world-wide to spread the Gospel? Jesus commanded regarding the Lord's Supper that we be faithful and truly prepared. Are we always prepared? Have we been faithful with the talents and blessings that God has entrusted us? Have we always faithfully taught our children the truths God's Word? Have we set an example of Christ's love among co-workers, students, or family? Too often we must say that we have sinned! We have lacked zeal in reflecting God's gracious promises to us! We complain instead of trust. When we must serve God, we drag our feet instead of having joy and a feeling that it's a privilege to be God's people! May our God have mercy on us! The Bible calls on us turn away from the desires of the sinful nature. We are to daily repent and find our only help in Christ's forgiveness.

We are to approach life with a godly attitude, just as Abraham did! Abraham did not join in with his neighbors in worshipping their gods. So for us, whatever things the sinful world tells us to seek, we must turn from and flee. If the world insists that we do everything for our personal glory, we must be willing to receive scorn for the sake of Christ, for we are living to please Him. The world desperately wants to hold on to life on earth, but our chief aim as

Christians is to depart and be with the Lord forever. God's will, which the world hates, will be our love and our standard for life! If only we could always live by His standard! Even with daily repentance, we are not faithful enough to please God.

Second, our covenant God does not change. God said to Abraham, *"This is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you."* (v.3-7) What a covenant! God freely gave Abraham all the benefits for forgiveness and a renewed life by faith. We have so much more. Once Jesus became a man, He established a new covenant for all people. No longer was Israel the sole people of God. The Bible states, *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."* Galatians 3:28-29 The Old covenant with sacrifices and priests was finished. Jesus established a new covenant when He gave His innocent life to pay for all sins.

We could do nothing to save ourselves. Jesus did it all, just as God promised. If Abraham and Sarah had joy in seeing God's promise fulfilled in their son Isaac, how much more should we be joyful that Christ has accomplished everything needed to give us eternal life! It states in Hebrews 9: *"Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance...."* (v. 15) Hebrews 8 also states, *"The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant.... I will be their God, and they will be my people.... For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."* (v. 8-12)

Abraham believed God's promises and it was credited to him as righteousness. God forgave his sins and saw Abraham as if he was without one fault. In response to God's grace, Abraham and the males of his household were circumcised. He also believed the promise about a son and when Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah 90 Isaac was born! That's living by faith! He followed God's commands so Isaac would be the sole child of promise for future generations of believers. He did these things not to earn God's favor, but because of God's favor already shown him!

Abraham lived a long time according to the Bible, 175 years. It states, *"Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age ...; and he was gathered to his people."* Genesis 25:7-8 Abraham was tired and worn and he longed for a better place. The destructive power of sin affected him as it affects us all. We read in Romans 5, *"Just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned."* (5:12) Death has power. It can strike at any time. It affects the old and the young, the rich and poor. Everything living is in a state of dying. We are all passing from life to death. And physical death is only the beginning. For any people who don't believe in Christ will have eternal death. Hell will be a dark, stinking, hateful place of torment that will never end. There will be no escape once people are there.

But, Christ came to save us from eternal torture and to even reverse the order so that we who believe in Him will go from death to life. Christ, who did not deserve death, gave His life on the cross, suffering all the torments of hell for us. He paid for our sins in full so that might be saved. That truth is God's covenant promise to us. And through Christ, God daily gathers his people home. Abraham was gathered with believers at his death. By faith in Christ, we will join him too! God has promised it in Christ, and He cannot fail. So, keep hearing God's saving truths that your faith may grow. Believe as Abraham did and you will remain a part of God's covenant family forever. Amen.