

The Covenant

Genesis 17:1-18

2/10/08

Intro

We have following the life of Abram, soon to be named Abraham. We have seen him growing in faith as he faces trials and challenges in his life. But God now comes to Abram and calls him to live differently before God. He is calling Abram to be changed.

There is also a difference in our lives between a believer and a circumcised believer. We come to faith in Christ when we recognize that we are sinners and that we need God to forgive our wretchedness, but there is a point in a believer's life when he must recognize that God wants more than just to give us salvation, He wants to give us a circumcised life.

I. Walk before God Almighty

- We studied earlier how God had established an everlasting covenant with Abram that was one-sided; that is to say, it was an unconditional promise of God to Abraham and that if the covenant was broken then the consequences would fall upon God.
- We saw that this is a picture of the New Covenant that is made to us in Jesus Christ.
- Here God comes to Abram again and speaks to this covenant of promise, but God is now going to call Abram to a changed life.

A. God doesn't need our help

- When we meet Abram in chapter 17 he is 99 years old. God has given him the promises of a multitude of descendants that would come from his own body.

- Chapter 16 can be summarized as Abram’s attempt to help God out.
- God had promised him a son, yet Sarai was an old woman far beyond child bearing years so Sarai presented her hand-maiden Hagar to have a son instead of her.
- Perhaps they thought this was a problem that was too difficult for God, and so they came up with their own creative solution.

Illus – When I realized that God wanted me to go to bible college and become a pastor, I came up with my own creative solution, but had something far greater in mind.

- Abram and Sarai’s solution brought Ishmael, Israel’s thorn the flesh even to this day.
- At this point in our story Ishmael is 13 years old and we can well imagine the bitterness, rebellion, and contempt would have been in their home.

Genesis 16: 11-12, The angel of the LORD said to her further, “Behold, you are with child, and you will bear a son; and you shall call his name Ishmael... He will be a wild donkey of a man, his hand *will be* against everyone, and everyone’s hand *will be* against him;”

App – Maybe you have your own story of when you decided to do things your own way, maybe even knowing that this wasn’t the right thing to do. You then know that the results are most unpleasant - trouble and difficulty and much more struggle than you ever would have had if you just would have listened to God in the first place!

Psalm 106:13, 15, They soon forgot His works; they did not wait for His counsel...they tested God in the desert... And He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul. NKJV

- God allowed Abram to see the consequences of his solution of 13 long years, but then God comes to Abram and presents a new name... El Shaddai – God Almighty; the all-sufficient one, (the God who knows what He is doing and how to do it.).

B. Be blameless before God

- God is able to demonstrate that He is perfectly capable of doing everything He desires to do.
- If we could only discover and know this truth for our own lives right now!!
- He begins by calling Abram to “walk before Me and be blameless.” It literally means to be wholehearted in blamelessness.

Psalm 51:6, Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, and in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.

- We know that it is impossible to be completely blameless before God on our own; we are fleshly in nature and have a tendency to sin.
- If a man were to try to obtain blamelessness by his own efforts, he would find that he is completely the “insufficient one.”

- But here again, that which is impossible with us is possible by God Almighty – the one who is able.

Luke 18:25-27, “For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” They who heard it said, “Then who can be saved?” But He said, “The things that are impossible with men are possible with God.”

- Because of what Christ has done in our behalf, He has made it possible to walk with God with all our hearts!!

C. God’s blessings are undeserved

- God then tells Abram that He will confirm the covenant He made with him and that He would “multiply you exceedingly.”
- He then speaks to the measure of God’s blessings on Abram by giving him a new name, Abraham, which means, “father of a multitude.”
- Sarai’s name (contentious) is changed to Sarah (princess).

Illus – Our name represents who we are. When people hear our name, they think of something about who we are.

- At first it may seem that being blameless of heart is a condition to God’s blessing Abraham exceedingly, but we then remember that God’s covenant to Abraham is without conditions.
- But that being said, God does want Abraham to walk before Him with a wholeheartedly

blameless heart; this is going to require a change in Abraham's life as we will see.

- There are exceedingly great blessings that God desires to pour out in our lives as well that are completely undeserved.
- If God gave us what we deserved, we would in fact be in great trouble!!

II Corinthians 9:8, And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed;

- Abraham's response is a wonderful example; He falls on his face. Instead of exalting himself and coming up with his own solution, he falls on his face in worship to God.
- In that position Abraham then receives blessings he could never accomplish on His own.

App – We have to see the contrast – when we refuse God's help and try to do our own thing our own way, we mess things up and end up making much more difficulty in our life than we ever imagined...

But if we trust God to be El Shaddai in our lives, He accomplishes blessing we could never have accomplished on our own.

- Falling on his face says that he isn't being stubborn at all, rather he humble and teachable.

Psalm 81:8-16 If we would only listen to God

II. Be Circumcised in Heart

- This is not a topic that most pastors would choose to teach on, and I'm sure this became a very sore subject for Abraham!
- But God is taking Abraham to the point of change and wants Abraham to have a mark in his life that speaks to the change of his heart.

A. Cut away the world

- When God then makes it clear that Sarah herself will have a son, he falls on his face and laughs.

App – this is probably why God doesn't tell us in advance what He is going to do, we would probably laugh as well because it's so difficult to imagine God's miraculous hand on our lives.

Abraham was 99 years old and Sarah was 90 years old and this seemed beyond comprehension.

- Abraham has failed in faith several times and here we see it again at first; he even comes up with Ishmael as a solution again!! (verse 18)
- God's answer was direct and to the point, "No, Sarah will have a son and his name will be Isaac."
- When God tells Abraham the boy's name, that is enough, Abraham immediately does what God asked him to do, and he circumcises all the men in his household.

- Of course, we understand now that there is a spiritual significance to circumcision; it represents the cutting away of the flesh.

Deuteronomy 30:6, “Moreover the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live.”

Romans 2:17-29 circumcision is of the heart

- The purpose of the symbol to Abraham was to represent that they belonged to God, that they were a people set apart, but what is the point of the outward symbol if there is no reality behind it?

B. Live by a heart that is changed

- We are called to salvation, yes, but also so much more, we are called to be changed in our heart.
- “Walk before me,” God said to Abraham. That represents the change God is calling him to.
- It could be understood by comparing the difference between living by *pressure* or *principle*.
- To live by *pressure* is to do things because if you don't, you'll get in trouble and you don't want trouble, so you are careful.
- To live by *principle* is to have a heart that is given to the Lord and you do things because your heart wants to walk before God and to

honor Him by walking according to the principles of His Word.

Galatians 5:6, For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.

Galatians 6:12-15 a new creation in Christ

App – that’s the point, God is doing a new work. Some people are stuck in a rut in their lives and they’re still the same way they did for the last 20 years!

But God is doing a new work in our lives if we would decide to walk before Him with hearts filled with desire after Him.