

Scripture Reading:

Genesis 15:1 “1 After these things the word of Jehovah came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."

2 But Abram said, "O Lord Jehovah, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3 Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!"

4 And behold, the word of Jehovah came to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir."

5 Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." 6 And he believed Jehovah, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

7 Then He said to him, "I am Jehovah, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it." 8 And he said, "O Lord Jehovah, how shall I know that I will inherit it?" 9 So He said to him, "Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." 10 Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. 11 And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. 12 Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him.

13 Then He said to Abram: "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. 14 And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. 15 Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. 16 But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." 17 And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces. 18 On the same day Jehovah made a covenant with Abram, saying: ‘To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates’”

Trusting God's Promises

It is a pleasure to be back with you this afternoon and I bring warm Christian greetings from the Saints in Sacramento! Christ Covenant has begun much like we did at Church of the King some three years ago with guest pulpit supply until we were ready to call a full-time pastor

- **This brings advantages and disadvantages: As visiting pastors come, you get to hear some of their best sermons!**
- **What you miss out on is consistent exegetical preaching through a book of the Bible, which is important and hearing from a man that knows the congregation well.**

As we go forward, Erik and I will try to bring a little of that consistency: Erik is taking you through a series of messages on Covenant Renewal Worship which is central to this young church. Lord-willing I will be preaching here the 1st Sunday of each month and what I want to do is try to compliment Erik's messages by studying why we trust God's promises: Taking a look at God's covenant of salvation and why we believe that the children born to believers are members of the covenant and should participate in the covenant sacraments of baptism and communion.

- **This week, I will be using Genesis chapter 15 as an introduction to covenants**
- **Next month we will make the case for baptizing our covenant children using Peter's sermon in Acts chapter two just before you have the blessing of seeing little Andronico Isador baptized**
- **And finally we will look at how Jesus viewed the children of the covenant and what Paul means when he commands us to discern the Body in I Corinthians eleven**

So now that we have a little idea of where we are going, we should look at how we are going to get there:

- **As a Bible-believing Church, we must believe the Bible!**

That may seem like a "no-brainer," but sometimes we have to step back and make sure that we are practicing what we say we believe:

In this case, being hearers AND doers of the Word as Jesus often admonished His followers. We must avoid “proof-texting” where we decide what we think the Bible should say about an issue, and then go looking for verses, in or out of context, that back us up. We must avoid “no creed but Christ” type of theology, where we act like it is spiritual to NOT get caught up in all sorts of theology debates and just focus on Jesus: -- Something the cults certainly hope that we do... So they can better ‘evangelize’ our children! NO, we must allow the Bible to shape our thinking and our theology:

- **The proverbs declare that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”**
- **Paul and Peter tells us that this book is God-breathed and profitable for instruction...**
- **So, we must believe that God gave us His revelation and that ALL of this book is His revelation.**

It is somewhat ironic that just as the 20th Century can be seen as the time where the battle for the Bible was won... it is also a time where we lost much of the Bible in our churches! Fundamentalists and evangelicals rightly fought so-called “higher critics” & outright skeptics that cast doubt on the authority of God’s Word.

- **The Chicago Congress on the Inerrancy of the Scripture was a major turning point and a great victory for God’s Church.**

However, while slaying that dragon, the Church was taken in by twin errors that resulted in the practical loss of much of the same Bible we had so rightly fought for! For eighteen centuries, the Church believed that the Jesus came to forgive the sins of His people, to establish His Church which He commissioned to disciple the nations: Through the Church, the New Jerusalem, Jesus had ushered in the new heavens and the new earth as promised in the Book of Revelation:

- **Seeing all of this as a fulfillment of God’s Covenant promises!**

God’s people certainly looked forward to future glory of Christ’s return and the final defeat of death, but salvation here and now impacted ALL of life:

- They had robustly what we would call today a world & life view of the Gospel!

Over the past two hundred years, we have shifted almost all of the Book of Revelation into the future and “spiritualized” our salvation with a very unhealthy pietism where spiritual things are up there and worldly things are down here!

- This had a profound impact on how the Church viewed the Bible!
- The liberals wanted to throw out the whole Book and we rightly said NO
- However, as we changed our view of God’s gracious salvation, we gave up most of it voluntarily:

Let me explain: The historic church and our great reformation creeds knew nothing of the modern teachings about God having a plan “A” for Israel and a plan “B” for salvation in the church. An Old Testament plan of salvation by works given by Moses which largely failed and then plan “B” with the church age and salvation by grace. They also resisted the temptation to see the body as ‘bad’ and the spirit as ‘good’ like the Greek philosophers and early Gnostic heretics did.

- We now have done both and these shifts greatly impacted which parts of the Bible were now relevant to us as believers in the “Church Age.”

Most of the Old Testament is GONE... different plan of salvation for a different people. Still might use some bits of wisdom in Psalms and Proverbs and maybe good moral lessons for Sunday School... But that is about it. Even when we move into the New Testament things changed: Most of the Gospels involve Jesus debating with the Jews about Old Testament stuff so it is interesting but not much direct application: The Sermon on the Mount only provides a few moral lessons. They taught that the “Church Age” began at Pentecost after Jesus has been rejected by His people:

- Paul provides teaching for the Church in His Epistles, but even much of he has to say is left behind when he gets too practical instead of being spiritual!

We don't know quite what to do with James and Hebrews...

And of course, Revelation is only talking about future stuff that takes place AFTER the church is raptured, so NO application there either: Just great material for best-selling fiction novels.

So our 'end-times' madness and Gnostic pietism have indirectly accomplished most of what the seminary liberals were unable to accomplish with a direct attack:

- **Most of the Bible is gone for practical purposes!**

Even though the Apostle Paul clearly instructs young Timothy that, "16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work!"

It is VERY important that we understand what has happened here, because it will impact how we settle the questions about what to do with our covenant children:

- **Should we baptize them as infants?**
- **Should they participate in the Lord's Supper?**
- **Or when it comes to the sacraments of the Church, should we pass them by until they can give a 'credible' profession of faith?**

Whether we believe that ALL of Scripture gives us instruction in these areas will definitely impact how we answer those questions!

- **I am beginning my series in the Book of Genesis because we do believe that ALL of Scripture is instructive...**
- **Genesis means beginnings, it is the book of beginnings!**

If we get things wrong here, or think it does not directly apply to the so-called Church Age, then most of the rest of our theology will be weak or wrong as well. In Genesis 3:15, God gave His promise to Adam, that the seed of the woman, Jesus Christ, would crush the seed of the serpent: Satan. Here we see the first indication that God would save His people from their sins: That He would establish His Church, glorify His bride and take His Kingdom to the whole earth:

- This theme is expanded and carried forward throughout the Bible ends in Revelation chapters 21 & 22 with a garden-city!

Later in Genesis, we have the flood & God making promises to Noah.

- We learn here that God gives signs, like the rainbow, to remind HIM of HIS promises!

In our reading from Genesis 15 this afternoon, we come to one of the most beautiful and the most instructive chapters in the Bible! Here we see the faithfulness of our covenant God and some basic instructions about covenants. It comes AFTER Abram has been victorious over five pagan kings and met King Melchizedek on his return which we will consider at the Table in a few moments. God comes and says, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.”

- God had already promised to make of Abram a great nation and so Abram was a little concerned at this point: *Being old & childless*

He actually complains to God that one of his servants will be his heir and God quickly assures him that this will not be the case:

- Here we learn that God is very patient with our honest doubts and concerns!

Then in verse 5 we read this: “5 Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." 6 And he believed Jehovah, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.”

Two important things here:

- First the wonder of the promise: A childless old man looking up at billions of stars on a clear night as God promises “So shall your descendants be”
- Next we see the power of God’s gift of faith: That’s right, we are being instructed here in Genesis about salvation by faith!

You see, the Apostle Paul had no problem seeing ALL the Bible as God’s Word and he uses this account in Romans chapter four to make his case for salvation by grace!

[That chapter can be your homework!]

- We will come back to this basic doctrine of believing God's promises over and over again in the next two messages.
- What I want to focus on as we conclude this week is what the Spirit teaches us here in Genesis about God's Covenant of Salvation

We know from Ephesians that God's gracious Covenant of Salvation was made before the foundation of the worlds among only the persons of the Trinity: *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*. Paul begins his Epistle with this glorious declaration: Ephesians 1:3 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved."

We are not given a blow-by-blow account of how this covenant between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit was made and as creatures we should know that most of it would be beyond our comprehension anyway

- What we can and DO know about that Covenant is given to us as God reveals various aspects of it in the Bible: Like Genesis 15!
- God shows Abram the stars to explain the impact of His Covenant
- Abram has believed God: *Demonstrating the gift of faith*
- God comforts Abram regarding the future of his descendents
- And finally, God demonstrates the security Abram has in trusting God's promise – *Security that he certainly needed if you think about the rest of his life!*

God tells Abram to bring animals as people in those times might have done when making a contract or a covenant: *[explain the covenant ritual]*

- So traditionally, if God and Abram are making a covenant they would walk together between the animals saying let this happen to me if I break this covenant.

That is not what happens and this should be of GREAT comfort to us as God's children, the heirs of Abraham.

- **When evening comes,
Abram sees God and God alone walk between the pieces!**
- **A beautiful, moving, and practical example of how our salvation is
ALL of grace**

Paul explains this clearly in Ephesians chapter 2: “4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

- **Abram did not have to promise to be good**
- **He did not have to pass through the pieces as a ‘partner’ with God in His salvation**
- **Abram had to do nothing to earn his salvation!**

Abram simply had to believe, in faith: A faith that was itself a gift from His loving Father. Here we clearly see the Gospel: salvation by grace in the Old Testament!

- **So, we must be a people of the Word... ALL of God’s Word!**
- **The gracious covenant which the Father, Son and Holy Spirit made before the foundation of the world is revealed from Genesis to Revelation!**

In the New Testament we see Jesus talking with the disciples on the road to Damascus expounding to them “in ALL the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” [*Old Testament!*]

With the Ethiopian eunuch, we see Phillip “preach Jesus to him” from the Book of Isaiah [*Old Testament!*]

And there are many examples in the Book of Acts where John, Peter and Paul use the Old Testament to show that Jesus is the Christ.

They were NOT explaining that God had shifted to plan 'B' because plan 'A' had failed!

- **Rather they proclaimed themselves to be eye witnesses of God's covenant faithfulness**
- **THE covenant that Abram believed unto salvation**
- **THE covenant promise that we claim for us and our children here at Christ Covenant Church!**

Lord-willing, we will learn to be a people of the Word...

A people who practice all that the Scriptures teach us to do!

A people who know that the God of Abraham is our SHIELD, our exceedingly great reward!

Communion Meditation:

Abraham saved Lot & defeated the kings:

Genesis 14:18 "Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High."

This is explained for us in:

Hebrews 7: "1 For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, 2 to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all, first being translated "king of righteousness," and then also king of Salem, meaning "king of peace," 3 without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually."

Our great High Priest who went before us and now brings us bread & wine