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The Gospel According to Matthew

You Must be Born Again (Part 7)

June 2, 2019

Sermon Text: Matt 15:10-20

Scripture Reading: Genesis 21:1-21

Mat 15:17-20 Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? (18) But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. (19) For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. (20) These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone.”

1. Review by reading Gen 15:6, quoted in Romans 4 and Gal 3. Promise.

I wanted to spend one more Sunday with you considering this subject: *you must be born again. The new birth. Regeneration.* Unless a person is born again, a creative work that only the Spirit of God can effect, they will never see the kingdom of God. Make no mistake – most people today and down through history who claim to be Christians, are not born again. They do not know the Lord and He does not know them. The “gospel” they profess is not the Promise. It is a system of works righteousness by which they are told that they can make themselves righteous before God.

Now, you remember that last time we talked about the Promise, and I want to review it for you, consider more of what Scripture says about it, and then apply it very practically to our own lives and experience, drawing as Scripture does from the illustrations of Isaac and Ishmael.

First then, recall this incredibly important passage:

Gen 15:1-6 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” (2) But Abram said, “O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” (3) And Abram said, “Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.” (4) And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: “This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.” (5) And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” (6) And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

It is not my imagination that this is perhaps the most important passage in the Old Testament. The Apostle Paul says so:

Rom 4:1-3 What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? (2) For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. (3) For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.”

Gal 3:5-9 Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith— (6) just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”? (7) Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. (8) And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” (9) So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

And we looked at many other Scriptures that refer to this covenant God made with Abraham as *The Promise*.

Rom 4:13-17 For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. (14) For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. (15) For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression. (16) That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,

(17) as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

Gal 3: (28) There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (29) And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

The Promise. It is a grave mistake and a distortion of the gospel to teach that this Promise was a covenant made only with Abraham and his physical descendants, the Jews. In part, that is what dispensational theology does.

So there is great emphasis in Scripture that the covenant God made with Abraham is a Promise made by God, dependent only upon God, and in fact is entirely of faith, not works. It is certain because it is God's doing, not ours. The Promise to Abraham in other words is the gospel, it is fulfilled by Christ, and by it the Lord called into existence a new Israel for Himself which consists only of people, Jew and Gentile alike, who have been born again and thus who are in Christ, the Seed of Abraham. This is why

Christians are called *children of promise*, because we were created by God's creative Word, not by anything we have done.

Joh 3:5-8 Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. (6) That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. (7) Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ (8) The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Now, let's go back and hear Jeremiah's important prophecy of the Promise, the New Covenant, once again:

Jer 31:31-34 “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, (32) **not like the covenant that I made with their fathers** on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. (33) For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after

those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

(34) And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

This New Covenant, which Hebrews makes very plain is the covenant fulfilled and accomplished by Christ and by which we are saved, *is not like the Mosaic covenant.* And fundamentally, here is why it is unlike that covenant of the Law:

It is the covenant God initiated with Abraham and fulfilled in Christ. The New Covenant, in other words, is by nature a covenant of promise, not a covenant of "do this and live."

Remember that the Lord told Abraham the blessing of the Promise would include being a "father of many nations." That aspect of the Promise is what the New Testament often refers to as "the mystery." For example:

Rom 16:25-26 Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my

gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages (26) but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—

And again:

Eph 3:6 This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Once again you see the serious error then of making God's Promise to Abraham fundamentally about the Jews and earthly Israel.

We see then that all of the tremendous emphasis in the New Testament upon these themes flows from the fact that the Lord's covenant with Abraham is one of Promise, not of works:

- Grace
- Mercy
- Faith alone
- Adoption as sons
- Children of promise

- Inheritance
- A New Jerusalem, the New Heavens and New Earth
- The genealogies of Matthew and Luke that show us Jesus is the promised Seed, a son of Abraham
- The new birth which is a work of God's Promise to write His law upon our hearts
- The command of the Great Commission that we go into all the world and preach the gospel to all the nations

All of this and more, all of it, flows out of the Covenant of Promise that God made with Abraham. Because it is of Promise, there is no room for boasting on our part, there is no place for claiming some kind of merit because of some deed we have done.

Let me give you an illustration of a denial of the Promise in our day which is parading as the gospel. Chris Moles, who you have heard me mention before, is a pastor back in West Virginia and he has become very active in the arena of domestic abuse in the church. He is sought after as a speaker and reckoned to be an authority on the subject. I don't like what Moles has to say because he puts his emphasis upon fixing the abuser. The following is an example of what I

mean. It was taken from his Facebook page last week:

We are currently not accepting applications for Men of Peace coaching as the 2019 session is already underway. After this current session of coaching is complete, we will begin restructuring the Men of Peace coaching program to better accommodate the increasing number of requests we receive from abusive men desiring biblical support and accountability as they walk through the repentance process. We tentatively anticipate this restructured Men of Peace program to launch sometime mid-2020.

Does that sound like Promise to you? It is quite popular with lots of people who claim to be Christians. A program that claims it can:

- Coach into righteousness
- Provide accountability so that wicked men will stop being wicked
- Walk wicked men through "the repentance process."

This is a false gospel. It is not of God's grace. It is not of Christ. It is not of

Promise, but rather is of works. Nothing good will be accomplished by it and in fact domestic abusers will be able to use it to further deceive their victims. Chris Moles cannot produce repentance. His program is an exercise of the flesh and will only produce the flesh.

Most so-called “Christian counseling” today is more of the same thing.

Now, let’s look at one more very important aspect of the Promise which you will see is vital for all of us to clearly understand. In Galatians chapters 3-4 Paul repeatedly refers to the Promise. Listen to what he says in the last part of chapter 4-

Gal 4:21-31 Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? (22) For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. (23) But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise.

(24) Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. (25) Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the

present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. (26) But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. (27) For it is written, “Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband.”

(28) Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. (29) But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. (30) But what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.” (31) So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

The true Israel, the real people of God, are the children of Promise. They are the new creation people that the Lord in Christ has created by the new birth through the powerful working of the Spirit of Promise. *But just as it was in the days of Isaac, so it is today. There are people who claim to be the people of God who are only born according to the flesh, not by the Spirit.* And what can we know with certainty such people will do?

But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now.

Let me ask you a question. *In your experience as a Christian, where have you experienced the most persecution from?* Consider this church. Over the years, where have the attacks come from? What kind of people have repeatedly tried to destroy this church and the work the Lord has called us to? You know the answer. The enemy has consistently been people who claim to belong to Christ.

Ishmael claimed to be a child of Abraham, and speaking according to the flesh, he was. But he was not a child of promise. He was not a creation of God whose very existence was entirely due to the Lord's doing, not Abraham's or Sarah's.

Heb 11:11-12 By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. (12) Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

We can expect it. So also it is now. Those who are born only of the flesh always persecute those born of the Spirit. This is how we can know who belongs to Christ and who does not.

How are we to deal with such people in the church? Paul tells us:

But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman."

Counterfeit Christians, people who claim to know Christ but who in fact are not born again, whose religion is one of the doings of the flesh, works done by themselves, have no part in Christ. They are darkness and they hate Christ's light. We are to cast them out. Send them away. See it? Sound too harsh? Well, that is precisely what Paul is telling the Galatians to do with such people who had infiltrated the churches in that region. Cast them out.

Because they will always, always, always persecute Christ's true people, the children of the Promise. They will make unity in a church impossible. They will fight and oppose Christ's truth. They will work to enslave others in their false religion. I have no doubt that most local churches today were

long ago over run by just such people and in a misguided and unbiblical notion of “love and mercy,” they have been allowed to remain until in many cases the church is no longer the church, but a den of robbers.

Christ is the Promised One. He is the One who fulfills God’s promise to us. And it is only because of Him and His work that we are righteous before God, by faith alone in Christ alone.