

**Genesis 17: 1-9; “My Covenant between Me and you”, Sermon # 49 in the series –  
“Beginnings”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on August 5<sup>th</sup>, 2012,  
in the Morning Worship Service.**

Abram is 99 years old. He has a wife who is barren and a 13 year old son by his wife’s servant girl Hagar. He and Sarai tried to fulfill the promise which God had given them, in their own way. They thought that they would have descendants by Sarai giving Abram to Hagar to wife. They thought that perhaps this was the way that they could have the child of promise. Abram did father a child with Hagar. What was easy for Hagar, her conceiving this child, led to her becoming proud and despising her mistress; thinking she was Sarai’s equal or even her superior. Abram delivered Hagar into Sarai’s hands to do with her what she pleased, and she dealt harshly with her.

She fled into the wilderness and was found by the angel of the Lord, who told her that she was still a servant, that she should go back and submit herself to her mistress. She was told that she would have a child and call his name Ishmael and that he would be a wild donkey of a man. His hand would be against every man, and every man’s hand would be against him.” I told you last week that God is indeed a God who sees us. He sees everything that happens to us, everything we are and everything we will become. God is infinitely great.

It may have been 13 years or more since God had personally come and appeared to Abram. I am not sure. And Abram and Sarai, it appears, still believed that Ishmael was the child of promise. Sometimes you and I, even as believers, can go a long way and a long time thinking that our own schemes of living the Christian life are true. And then God shows us the truth about ourselves. I do not believe that God was pleased with Abram and Sarai’s going outside of their covenant of marriage to try to fulfill that which He had purposed to freely give them.

Sometimes when God is displeased with His people in something that they have done, something which has bad consequences to the lives of many other people, He will leave them to themselves and to those consequences for a long time so that they might feel and understand their sinful mistake. It may be years before He will take up His cause and theirs in their life, to fulfill His promise. But you can be sure that if you are a true Christian that He will. He will never leave you or forsake you in a final sense.

Now it says in verse 1 that “when Abram was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to Abram.” It was not simply that he heard a voice that spoke to him, but He saw this glorious Divine Being in human form, probably the Angel of the Lord; the pre-incarnate Christ who appeared to him and made a Covenant with him. The Covenant that we find God making with him here, is a covenant of God’s purpose. In it, He begins to disclose to Abram what He intends to do to separate and distinguish one line of his descendants after him, whom He would have to know Him as a special people. This would be the nation of the Jews.

Abram was the first Hebrew. But I want you to take notice of the fact that this covenant is very personal. In verse 2 it is called by God, “My covenant between Me and you.” Even though in going on to elaborate on it, God states that it will involve many people from many nations, all proceeding from Abram, yet this covenant begins very personally, with one man. So that you will understand this better, let me give you the words of Andrew Fuller. He says, “The very idea of a covenant is expressive of peace and good will; and in this, and some other instances, it is not confined to the party, (the one person the covenant is made with) but extends to others for his sake.”

“Thus, as we have seen, God made a covenant of peace, which included the preservation of the world; but it was with one man, even Noah, and the world was preserved for his sake.” “And the covenant in question is one that shall involve great blessings to the whole world in all future ages; yet it is not made with the world, but with Abram.” “God will give them blessings, but it

shall be through him.” “Surely these things were designed to familiarize the great principle on which our salvation should rest.” “It was the purpose of God to save perishing sinners; yet his covenant is not originally with them, but with Christ. With him it stands fast; and for his sake they are accepted and blessed.”(end of quote)

And so it is in this context that I would like us to look together at this passage. God is a Covenant Maker and a Covenant Keeper but He would have us to be those who keep His Covenant which He has made with us if we have believed in Jesus Christ. I see 3 declarations of purpose that God makes in this text that showed Abram that God would separate and distinguish one line of his descendants into a nation. And these same 3 declarations of purpose on God’s part show us what New Testament covenant keepers, those who believe in the Lord Jesus, should be doing as well. For Abram is the Father of all the faithful. We, whom God has brought into Covenant with Himself through the Lord Jesus, are expected to respond to God’s expectations for our Christian lives in 3 ways.

**1<sup>st</sup> – God would have all who are in personal covenant with Him to be holy.**

When the Lord appeared to Abram it says in verse 1 that He said, “ I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless.” This is the first time that we find this name of God in the Bible; “Almighty God.” It is the words, El Shaddai. It means, “God all sufficient”. It means “God the Conqueror.” Is it not interesting that God gives Abram, as a prologue to His covenant of purpose the idea that He will be Abram’s all sufficient help and portion and strength to do what He is asking him to do as he walks before Him? He is commanding Abram to walk before Him blameless. He is the One, the only One who will be able to conquer and subdue all the motions of sin in his heart, all those passions in his breast. He is the only One who can provide and supply the grace that Abram would need to take any step forward in faith and keep him on the path of righteousness.

To be holy Abram must have God. To be holy you and I must have God. The command is to walk before God. This means that God is watching what you the believer are doing and the way that you go about doing things. God would see what kind of way that Abram walked. If he walked straight, it would be because the eyes of his heart were seeing clearly the boundaries that define the godly life, and all godly behavior. If he walked crooked, it was because his heart was being drawn away by his own lusts, and thinking that perhaps his own way was better than God’s. Only God could preserve him in any good thought, or word, or deed. Abram was told to “be blameless”, or “perfect”. This does not mean that he was to think that he could be sinlessly perfect.

It rather means, as John Calvin says, that he was “a man of perfections, *one* who was not of a deceitful or double-minded, but *one who* sincerely cultivated doing the right thing in his heart or mind.” If you would know God’s purpose and plan for your individual life, you must understand first that God expects you to be holy. You are to be holy as He is holy. You are to be perfect as He is perfect. You are not to try to change His standards and expectations for you, thinking that you can get away with a little sin here and a little sin there, or an occasional big sin over here because nobody is perfect and God understands you and accepts you living in sin. You must entirely rid yourself of such thoughts!

I suppose that I should attempt to illustrate this from the lesser to the greater, from the human to the divine. Some people regularly disregard entirely the speed limits on the highway when they are driving. They are only man made laws, they think. They think to themselves, I cannot be bound by them. I am willing to pay the fines if I am caught and pulled over. And it is true that you can play with the speed limit and perhaps not get caught, and perhaps you might try to justify breaking it in a number of ways. But it is an indication of your heart is it not? You don’t want anybody to tell you how fast you can drive. Or, you think that the speed limit is too slow. But I wonder if you might be trying to transfer this same kind of thinking over to the holy

laws of God without really thinking about it?

Perhaps there are some here this morning who believe that they can try to play fast and loose with God's laws because they are under grace and not under law. But I hope that you see that God's law is a higher law than man's. God's law is a holy standard which cannot be violated without sinning against Him. God's expectations for our obedience to His commandments are not lowered from the Old testament to the New. In fact they are deepened and amplified because Christ has come and fulfilled the Law! It is true that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Christ, therefore, has given you the perfect example of holiness, and of blamelessness, for you to consider, as you live your Christian life. Will you move toward it in your heart, or will you be of an antinomian spirit? An antinomian is a person who is "against law". They believe that they are free to do as they please because they have believed in Christ. This is a grave error, held to by many who profess to be Christians.

Some people think that having Christ's grace means that they do not need to keep commandments. They do not want to take the time to treasure up God's commandments in their hearts. But they know them as outward boundaries for their behavior in their minds. And they forget that a true obedience is a heart obedience; walking before, and in, the sight of God. They forget that Jesus had God's law within his heart. He delighted to do it. "O, how I love thy law O Lord. It is my meditation day and night. Thy commandments make me wiser than my enemies for they are ever mine!" (Psalm 119: 97)

God is looking at your heart, dear believer! And He sees what your intention is. He sees whether you are true and sincere, or selfish and unloving. The fulfillment of the law is love. Against the fruit of the Spirit, there is no law. To walk this way is to walk blamelessly. If you intend to walk blamelessly, you will study to be upright and sincere in relation to God and men. People as they look at you, see that you are not trying to justify yourself as a righteous man, but rather they will be able to see that you have been humbled by God's grace to truly love God and Christ most of all, and His people as well. "This is love, that we walk according to His commandments." (2<sup>nd</sup> John 6)

Let us ask ourselves this morning as we come to the Lord's Table whether we love Christ because He fulfilled the Law of God on our behalf? And then, let us ask ourselves also whether we love God by sincerely trying to be blameless, by the grace of Christ. No person can lay a charge of sin at your doorstep, but even more, since God is the examiner of your heart, does He see that you are trying to please Him by walking in His commandments, and keeping short accounts with Him in your heart each and every hour of the day? Think about it, and if you find that you are not doing this, I would ask that you would pray, confessing your sin, and ask Christ that you would be able to start doing so today. That is why Jesus died.

**Now 2<sup>nd</sup> – God would have all who are in personal covenant with Him to believe in the fulfillment of the promises by His making them fruitful.** (Verses 2-6)

The words used in verses 2 and 6 are very wonderful in the power and beauty of them. "I will multiply you exceedingly," and "I will make you exceedingly fruitful." It reminds me of the verse in Ephesians 3: 20, "Now to Him that is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we can ask or think, according to the power that works in us." This is something that each of us needs to consider more. God is the only one that can take a life broken by sin and shame and misery and change it so that that person is fruitful unto faith and good works and holiness. Abram had not given up on the promise of God to him that he and Sarah were going to have a child, but he did not know how or when God was going undertake to do all that He had promised to do for him.

And now, so many years later, here is God coming to him and His saying to him that He is going to make nations and kings come from him. And to show him that He really is going to do this for him, God says, "I am going to change your name." "No longer shall your name be called

Abram but your name shall be called Abraham.” No longer shall your name simply mean Exalted Father. Now it shall mean the Father of a multitude. We sometimes do not believe that we can change, or that things can change for us for the better, so that we find ourselves fruitful in God’s service. But it is not so. All things are possible with God. Even a new name is possible. Even a fruitful life is possible. But it only comes by being in covenant with God. It is not based upon your keeping the law, but upon having your faith in what Christ has already accomplished for you.

This, then, leads to your thinking about and believing what He can and will do for you to cause you to be spiritually fruitful. I think that if we would really contemplate how very great the power and glory of God is, to be able to accomplish all things related to us, that we would fall on our faces with Abraham and be ashamed of ourselves. Let’s look at what God did for Abraham. Turn with me over with me over to Romans Chapter 4. We need to remember how old Abraham was when he received this promise of future fruitfulness. He was 99 years old. It came to him at the very time when he considered himself too old for he and Sarai to have a child.

This was all written down for our instruction that you and I would remember that through Jesus Christ we are in covenant with God, and because of the power of Christ’s grace, God can give us grace to be fruitful at any stage in our life when we are trusting in Him. Verse 13 – “For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.” “For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect, because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression.”

“Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all (as it is written, ‘I have made you a father of many nations) in the presence of Him whom he believed—even God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did; who contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, “So shall your descendants be.”

“And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah’s womb.” “He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convince that what He had promised He was also able to perform.” This is the thing that you must remember; that He who has begun a good work in you will perform it until the Day of Christ. And this will include your becoming fruitful for Him, according to His plans for you. Do not waver in unbelief concerning the promise of Jesus Christ. If you abide in Him and He abides in you, you will bear much fruit, but let us remember that without Him we can do nothing.

**And then, 3<sup>rd</sup> – God would have all who are in personal covenant with Him to be looking and living for what they can everlastingly possess.** (Verses 7-9)

The covenant that was given here to Abraham is spoken of as an everlasting covenant. For God to say that it would be an everlasting covenant means that Christ’s work is the basis of it. The land which was to be given to Abraham’s descendants would be an everlasting possession. Now, it may be indeed be true that the physical land of Canaan is an everlasting possession of the Jews in God’s mind, but someday all of the earth and its works will be burned up. Surely we need to understand that the only thing really everlasting about what God did for Abraham and the Hebrew nation was to give them Jesus Christ and the salvation that was worked out by Him.

That great salvation gave Abraham and his descendents the everlasting possession of eternal life, the eternal city that was made without hands whose builder and maker was God. The literal physical inheritance of the land of Canaan is everlasting only in the sense that it was Immanuel’s land, a foretaste of the believer’s eternal land and dwelling place; the New Heavens and the New

earth, in which dwells righteousness; presently, the place where God is and where His glory dwells. Abraham and the Jews were to keep this covenant throughout their generations until it was fulfilled in Christ who was the fulfillment of God's Covenant of Purpose to bring salvation and blessing to all the families of the earth. Today, both Jews and Gentiles are in covenant with God through the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That work is set forth for us here today in these elements which we are about to partake of. We are to "proclaim the Lord's death" in our eating this bread and by our drinking the cup. We, that is our church as it gathers, and all other true churches of Christ, are to do this, "until He comes". God is the One who has established His covenant with us, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us examine ourselves, confessing our sins where we see them, and resolve by grace to repent of every known sin, and know that He welcomes us to this Supper.