

Genesis 17:1-7 & 15-16

17 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. ² And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.” ³ Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, ⁴ “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. ⁵ No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. ⁶ I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. ⁷ I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. ¹⁵ God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. ¹⁶ I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.”

Romans 4:13-25 - ¹³ It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. ¹⁴ For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless, ¹⁵ because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression. ¹⁶ Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. ¹⁷ As it is written: “I have made you a father of many nations.” He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and called into being things that were not. ¹⁸ Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” ¹⁹ Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. ²⁰ Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, ²¹ being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. ²² This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.” ²³ The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, ²⁴ but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. ²⁵ He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

THE WORD: “PROMISE” IS AN IMPORTANT PART WORD FOR PEOPLE OF FAITH.

GENERALLY, A PROMISE IS A DECLARATION OR ASSURANCE THAT ONE WILL DO A PARTICULAR THING OR THAT A PARTICULAR THING WILL HAPPEN.

IT ALSO MEANS AN ASSURANCE ONE WILL DEFINITELY DO OR GIVE SOMETHING. AND IN THE BIBLE, THE CENTRAL PROMISE-GIVER IS GOD

BOTH OF THE SCRIPTURE READINGS THIS MORNING DRAW OUR ATTENTION TO THE PROMISES OF GOD AND WHY THEY CAN BE TRUSTED.

IN TODAY’S PASSAGE FROM GENESIS, GOD REINTRODUCES HIMSELF TO ABRAM BEFORE HIS NAME WAS CHANGED TO ABRAHAM, SAYING “I AM GOD ALMIGHTY, WALK BEFORE ME, AND BE BLAMELESS.”

THE FIRST THING OF NOTE IN THE VERSE IS GOD’S SELF DESCRIPTION: “GOD ALMIGHTY”.

HERE THE LORD TELLS ABRAM, HE HAS THE POWER TO ACCOMPLISH WHAT HE PROMISES, WHICH IS WHY GOD’S WORD CAN BE BELIEVED.

NOTICE ALSO, WHAT GOD DECLARES TO HIM: “I WILL MAKE MY COVENANT BETWEEN YOU AND ME, I WILL MAKE YOU FRUITFUL, I WILL GIVE YOU AND YOUR OFFSPRING AFTER YOU THE LAND OF CANAAN. I WILL BE THEIR GOD.”

THE SECOND NOTEWORTHY THING TO LOOK AT IS GOD CALLING ABRAHAM, “BLAMELESS”.

THIS DID NOT MEAN HE WAS WITHOUT SIN, BUT RATHER GOD SAW HIM AS BEING LOYAL TO AND TRUSTING IN THE LORD, AND ACTING ON THAT TRUST.

HERE IS A STORY THAT REMINDS US ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF NOT ONLY HAVING FAITH BUT ACTING ON IT.

HUDSON TAYLOR WAS A MISSIONARY WHO LEFT HIS HOME IN ENGLAND, IN THE LATE 1800'S TO GO TO CHINA AS A MISSIONARY.

HE WOULD SPEND 51 YEARS WORKING AMONG THE CHINESE AND ESTABLISHING CHURCHES THERE.

BUT HE ALMOST NEVER MADE IT. IT IS SAID THE SHIP HE WAS ON HAD BECOME STALLED NOT FAR FROM A ISLAND KNOWN TO BE INHABITED BY CANNIBALS.

THERE WAS NOT EVEN A HINT OF A BREEZE AND THE VESSEL SLOWLY BEGAN TO DRIFT TOWARDS SHORE.

IF THE SHIP BECAME GROUNDING TOO NEAR THE ISLAND THEY WOULD BE IN TROUBLE.

THE SHIP'S CAPTAIN ASKED THE MISSIONARY TO PRAY THAT THE WIND WOULD RETURN.

TAYLOR ASKED THE CAPTAIN TO SET THE SAILS TO CATCH THE BREEZE.

BUT WHEN HE HESITATED, BECAUSE DOING SO MIGHT MAKE HIM LOOK FOOLISH, TAYLOR SAID HE WOULD NOT BEGIN TO PRAY UNTIL THE SAILS WERE UNFURLED.

THE CAPTAIN OBEYED AND TAYLOR PRAYED, AND AFTER SOMETIME THE WIND PICKED UP AND THE SHIP SAILED AWAY.

THIS IS AN EXAMPLE OF FAITH NEEDING TO BE PUT INTO PRACTICE WITH ACTION.

HUDSON TAYLOR TRUSTED GOD TO SAVE THEM AND DEMONSTRATED THAT TRUST BY WANTING THE SAILS TO BE SET TO CATCH THE BREEZE WHEN IT CAME.

I FOUND A DECLARATION ABOUT FAITH THAT FITS THIS SITUATION, AS WELL AS THE STORY OF ABRAHAM. IT SAYS:

"FAITH IS A REASONING TRUST. IT IS FACING PROBLEMS AND REALIZING THEIR REALITY. IT IS REFLECTING ON THE PROMISES OF GOD IN LIGHT OF HIS CHARACTER...."

THIS REFLECTION CAN HELP US BELIEVE GOD'S PROMISE, WHICH IS WHAT ABRAHAM DID.

ABRAHAM WAS CALLED BY GOD TO TAKE HIS WIFE SARAH AND HEAD TO THE LAND TO WHICH GOD WOULD DIRECT THEM.

HE WAS TOLD HE WOULD BECOME THE FATHER OF MANY NATIONS.

HE TRUSTED IN GOD'S WORD AND WENT. HE ACTED BASED ON HIS FAITH IN GOD WHO CALLED HIM TO A NEW DESTINY.

ABRAHAM'S ACTIONS WERE NOT ALWAYS RIGHT, HE MADE SEVERAL BIG ERRORS IN JUDGEMENT.

HE, LIKE ALL OF US, STRUGGLED AT TIMES WITH HIS FAITH, HE SOMETIMES TRIED TO WORK THINGS OUT HIS OWN WAY WHEN GOD WAS NOT ACTING AS QUICKLY AS HE HOPED.

HE EVEN MADE SUGGESTIONS TO GOD ABOUT HOW HIS PROMISE COULD BE FULFILLED IN A DIFFERENT WAY THAN GOD SAID IT WOULD BE.

BUT THE MESSAGE IN THE BIBLE IS- ABRAHAM NEVER LOST HIS FAITH IN THE LORD, EVEN HIS MISTAKES WERE DONE BASED ON HIS FAITH IN GOD'S PROMISE TO HIM.

THE APOSTLE, IN HIS LETTER, REMINDS HIS READERS OF ABRAHAM, WHOM GOD PROMISED WOULD BE THE FATHER OF MANY NATIONS THROUGH HIS WIFE SARAH.

HE DRAWS THEIR ATTENTION BACK TO GENESIS AND GOD'S PROMISE WHICH ABRAHAM BELIEVED.

PAUL ALSO REFERENCED THE FACT THAT GOD DECLARED HIM TO BE RIGHTEOUS BEFORE HE ESTABLISHED HIS COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM.

THUS THE EMPHASIS IS THAT IT WAS NOT BY FOLLOWING THE MANDATES OF THIS COVENANT, THAT IS BY OBEYING GOD'S RULES THAT MADE HIM RIGHTEOUS, BUT BY HIS FAITH.

THE APOSTLE'S PURPOSE WAS TO REMIND HIS READERS SALVATION IS NOT SOMETHING THAT CAN BE EARNED BY US.

INDEED NOT, JESUS IS AT THE CENTER OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH BECAUSE HE WAS THE ONE WHO PAID THE PRICE OF OUR SALVATION.

THUS SALVATION IS A GIFT FROM GOD, IT IS GRACE, WHICH WE ACCEPT BY FAITH. THIS IS WHY WE CAN BE ENCOURAGED BY THE GRACE GOD SHOWED TO ABRAHAM.

CHRISTIANS BECOME RIGHTEOUS, NOT BASED ON WHAT WE HAVE DONE OR NOT DONE, BUT THROUGH JESUS. IT IS HE WHO MAKES US RIGHTEOUS IN GOD'S SIGHT.

THE APOSTLE EXPLAINS THIS TO THE CHRISTIANS OF ROME BY THE EXAMPLE OF ABRAHAM, WHO PAUL EXPLAINED TRUSTED IN THE PROMISE GOD MADE TO HIM OF A SON BY SARAH.

THEN HE ADDS: "THEREFORE HIS FAITH WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."

THE WORD "RECKONED" CAN ALSO BE TRANSLATED AS "CREDITED".

THIS BRINGS TO MIND FINANCIAL TERMS. CREDIT, WHEN WE THINK OF MONEY, ALLOWS US TO TAKE OUT A LOAN OR HAVE A CREDIT CARD TO PURCHASE THINGS.

OF COURSE IF WE DO NOT PAY OUR BILLS OR PAY BACK OUR LOANS IT AFFECTS OUR CREDIT SCORE.

SIN, AS WE KNOW FROM THE WAY WE PRAY THE LORD'S PRAYER, IS A TYPE OF DEBT.

IT IS A DEBT WE OWE TO GOD THAT WE CANNOT REPAY. SIN RUINS OUR SPIRITUAL CREDIT SCORE WITH GOD, NONE OF US HAVE A PERFECT SCORE.

AND NO, SO MATTER HOW HARD WE WORK TO BUILD IT UP, WE WILL ALWAYS FALL SHORT OF EARNING SALVATION.

THIS IS WHY WE NEED JESUS. HE COVERS OUR DEBTS AND CORRECTS OUR CREDIT SCORE SO THAT IT IS PERFECT.

IT IS BY FAITH THAT WE ACCEPT THE COVENANT MADE BETWEEN US AND GOD ALMIGHTY THAT IS SEALED IN THE BLOOD OF CHRIST.

LOOKING AGAIN AT GENESIS WE ARE REMINDED GOD GAVE NEW LIFE TO THE WOMB OF SARAH, SO THAT AGAINST EVERYTHING THAT WAS HUMANLY POSSIBLE SHE BORE A SON.

WE CAN LOOK TO HOW GOD FULFILLED THAT PROMISE AND HIS OTHER PROMISES AS RECORDED IN SCRIPTURE AND BE ENCOURAGED IN OUR OWN FAITH.

INDEED, THE PROMISE OF OUR SALVATION THROUGH CHRIST IS WORTHY OF OUR TRUST, AND IT IS THE BASIS FOR THE CHRISTIAN FAITH AND LIFE.

LENT IS A TIME WE SET ASIDE IN THE CHURCH YEAR TO THINK ABOUT THIS, ESPECIALLY AS WE PREPARE FOR THE CELEBRATION OF EASTER.

FAITH IS A PART OF THIS PROCESS- IN PARTICULAR THE MESSAGE OF SCRIPTURE THAT JESUS NOT ONLY DIED ON THE CROSS TO PAY OUR DEBT OF SIN, BUT ALSO WAS RAISED TO LIFE AGAIN.

IT IS THE BODILY RESURRECTION OF JESUS THAT OFTEN IS A STUMBLING BLOCK TO PEOPLE.

INDEED SOME OTHER RELIGIONS SAY JESUS WAS A REAL PERSON AND THAT HE DIED ON THE CROSS, IT IS BELIEF IN HIS PHYSICAL RESURRECTION THEY TAKE EXCEPTION TO.

SOME CHRISTIANS ALSO STRUGGLE AT TIMES WITH THIS. IT CAN BE HARD TO HOLD ON TO FAITH WHEN MOST OF THE WORLD CALLS OUR FAITH FICTION AND NOT FACT.

IT CAN ALSO BE HARD TO "KEEP THE FAITH" WHEN TROUBLE AND TRAGEDY IN THE WORLD, OR IN OUR OWN LIVES, CALL GOD'S POWER AND PROMISES INTO QUESTION.

WHEN THIS HAPPENS, WE CAN AGAIN LOOK TO ABRAHAM AS AN EXAMPLE. HE BELIEVED GOD AND YET STRUGGLED AT TIMES.

REMEMBER ABRAHAM SOMETIMES TRIED TO WORK OUT GOD'S PROMISES IN HIS OWN WAY.

THERE WERE ALSO TIMES HE MADE SUGGESTIONS TO GOD ABOUT HOW THE PROMISE COULD BE FULFILLED.

AND YET GOD STILL COUNTED HIS FAITH AS RIGHTEOUSNESS EVEN WHEN HE WRESTLED WITH HIS FAITH.

ANOTHER POINT ABOUT HIS FAITH THAT IS SIGNIFICANT FOR US IS-HE NEVER DENIED THE PROBLEMS HE FACED.

THIS REMINDS US THAT FAITH IS NOT ABOUT DENYING REALITY OR THE DIFFICULTIES OF LIFE.

INSTEAD IT IS RECOGNIZING THEM, AND SEEKING GOD'S HELP IN FACING THEM. THIS IS ONE WAY WE CAN GROW IN FAITH.

A PASTOR NAMED CHRIS SURBER, WHO IS AN EX-MARINE SHARED A STORY FROM HIS TRAINING THAT HE LATER VIEWED AS AN ILLUSTRATION OF FAITH.

THE OBSTACLE OR "CONFIDENCE" COURSE IS A PART OF STANDARD TRAINING, AND IT INCLUDES HAVING TO REPEL DOWN A FOUR STORY TOWER.

SURBER SAID IT WAS THE MOST DIFFICULT PART BECAUSE HE HAS A FEAR OF HEIGHTS, AND SO IT WAS NOT EASY FOR HIM TO TRUST THE IN THE ROPE.

OF COURSE HE STILL HAD TO DO IT AND WAS ABLE TO LAND SAFELY.

LATER ON, WHEN HE WENT THROUGH SERGEANT'S TRAINING HE HAD TO DO IT AGAIN.

HE SAID HE WAS STILL AFRAID THE SECOND TIME, BUT HAVING DONE IT ONCE HE WAS ABLE TO TRUST MORE IN THE ROPE.

STEPPING OUT IN FAITH IS LIKE THAT, IT DOES NOT MEAN WE ARE NOT AFRAID, BUT THAT WE TRUST GOD MORE THAN OUR FEAR.

THERE IS A POEM CALLED "WHAT GOD HATH PROMISED", WHICH OFFERS INSIGHT INTO HOW TO LIVE BY FAITH IN THE MIDST OF EARTHLY LIFE.

"GOD HATH NOT PROMISED SKIES ALWAYS BLUE, FLOWER STREWN PATHWAYS ALL OUR LIVES THROUGH.

GOD HATH NOT PROMISED SUN WITHOUT RAIN, JOY WITHOUT SORROW, PEACE WITHOUT PAIN.

BUT GOD HATH PROMISED STRENGTH FOR THE DAY, REST FOR THE LABOR, LIGHT FOR THE WAY.

GRACE FOR TRIALS, HELP FROM ABOVE, UNFAILING SYMPATHY AND UNDYING LOVE."

THIS IS WHAT ALL THOSE IN SCRIPTURE, WHO TRUSTED IN THE LORD AND HIS PROMISES EXPERIENCED.

THIS IS WHAT GOD OFFERS US TODAY AND EVERYDAY, EVEN IF WE ONLY HAVE A MUSTARD SEED'S AMOUNT OF FAITH.

LET US PRAY: ALMIGHTY GOD, WE PRAISE YOU FOR YOUR GRACE, AND YOUR FAITHFULNESS TO YOUR PROMISES.

WE REMEMBER WITH GRATITUDE THE NEW COVENANT THAT UNDERGIRDS OUR LIVES HOPE IN, AND GIVES US PEACE, THROUGH THE GIFT OF YOUR SON, JESUS.

SEND YOUR SPIRIT, TO HELP US TO LIVE BY FAITH, AND TO SERVE YOU IN THE WORLD. THOUGH THE JOURNEY IS LONG, YOU HAVE PROMISED TO SUSTAIN US, AND FOR THAT WE GIVE YOU THANKS. AMEN

SERMON SUMMARY: GENESIS 17:1-7,15-16 & ROMANS 4:13-25

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