



Sermon – 10/09/2022
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Verses Covered This Week

Genesis 17:1 - 14

Romans 4:11, 16 – 17

Galatians 3:16

Deuteronomy 30:6

Romans 2:28 - 29

Let me invite you to open your Bibles with me. We're going to be in Genesis 17 this morning. Genesis 17. If you're a guest with us in the room or catching us by video, welcome home. You know, God has a sense of humor. Uh this morning, we get to celebrate our parent dedication and this morning's messages on the subject of circumcision. There will be no live demonstrations as part of that today. Just to clear things up. We're right in the middle of the story of Abraham and we see over the last couple weeks that God speaks, then God sees, now, God seals. And this thing has been building to this moment for chapter after chapter in Genesis where back in Genesis 12 we see the calling of Abraham. In Genesis 15 we see the covenant with Abraham. And now in Genesis 17, we see the confirmation of Abraham. This confirmation of the covenant that has everything to do, not just with his life but ours today. Let's see how this passage plays out beginning in chapter 17 and verse 1. Here's what it says.

¹When 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, ²that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly." ³Then Abraham fell on his face. And God said to him, ⁴"Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. ⁵No longer shall you be names, your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. ⁶I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. ⁷And 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. ⁸And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God." ⁹And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. ¹⁰This is my

covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised.

Let's pray together.

Father, as we turn our hearts to Your word, there are so many distractions in this world that seek to divide our hearts from You, Lord. And I ask You now in this moment that You would re-center our hearts, that You would remind us of the covenant promise that is ours in Christ and You would call us to a deeper commitment so that we might walk with You more faithfully. And we ask these things in Christ's name. Amen.

Well, have you heard the joke about the Catholic priest and the Baptist preacher and the Jewish rabbi out in West Texas? They got together one day and decided, we want to see who's the best at our job. And so they decided to have a contest. They were supposed to go out into the pasture lands and find themselves a bull and see if they could convert that bull to their religion. So, they all went out to for a little while and they came back together once they were done to see how each of them did. And the Catholic priest stepped up first, and he said, "When I found the bull, I started by sprinkling it with holy water. Then I took confession from it and this Sunday, he's going to celebrate his first communion. The other guys were pretty impressed. And so the Baptist preacher steps up next, and he says to the other guys, "When I came across the bull, I preached the Gospel to it. I gave an altar call and he asked me to baptize him in the stock pond." And that's when the priest and the pastor looked at the Jewish rabbi who had come in to the meeting covered in head to toe in a full body cast. And the Baptist preacher said, what happened to you? He said, "Well, on second thought, maybe it wasn't such a good idea to start with the circumcision." Here's the deal though. In Genesis 17, God does the unthinkable. He starts with the circumcision. That's the beginning. That's the sign. That's the symbol of the covenant that we have there in the text. It's marking out a people for His possession. And this passage has big implications not just for Abram, not just for the nation of Israel, not even for that poor bull in West Texas. This passage has implications for you and for me. It changes everything for us. I mean, think about what's happening here. After Genesis 16, Abram has run from God in failure and sin. And now, he's waited what the text tells us is 13 long years. Wondering if God would ever show up and keep His promise. And yet here in the text, God meets, meets Abram in his failure and responds to him with His covenant faithfulness. This passage is at the heart of the entire storyline of Scripture. In fact, if you were to go back and look in the New Testament, you'll see Genesis 17 shows up more than two dozen times because of the significance of this moment. At the heart of it, is the confirmation of a covenant.

And here's what we're going to notice this morning is God confirms His covenant with Abram. It's going to show us that there are several ways God's commitment us through His covenant should drive us toward commitment to Him. And we're going to notice the first one starting back in verse 1. We see how the sealing of the of, the covenant shapes our commitment to God. Because that's what's taking place here. In this confirmation of the covenant, there is a sealing that's going on. And if you put yourself in Abram's shoes, when God shows up for what seems like the first time in 13 years, you may be on pins and needles. How's He going to respond? How will He treat me after the way I turned away from Him? But what we notice is God doesn't turn away from Abram in anger; He turns toward him in covenant love. He seals that covenant

with a confirmation, with a promise. And remember what we talked about back in Genesis 15 about what the covenant is. The covenant is a foundational promise from God rooted in his character and in his commitment. And when God restores Abram by reiterating the covenant, it shows us several ways that we are called to a kingdom commitment in response to God's covenant.

And so right here beginning in verse 1, we see how God reshapes our kingdom character. So, look at the way it talks about God. It speaks of Him there in verse 1, as the God Almighty. And the command He gives is to walk before Him blamelessly, to be pure in heart, to carry out His command. And that goes hand in hand with what we see in verse 2 where it says that I may make a covenant between you and Me. You see, Abram had previously walked away from God in Egypt. Now, he's called to walk with him. Abram had previously been worthy of blame for his failure with Hagar. But now He is calling him to walk blamelessly. At the core of this restoration of the covenant, is a call to kingdom character. To walk in a manner worthy of the Gospel. To forget what lies behind and press forward to what lies ahead in Jesus Christ. And in the midst of that kingdom character is the markings of a new identity. You see that new identity show up there in verses 4 and 5 through both a new role and a new name. So, what's this new role that God gives them? Look at the second half of verse 4 when it says,

⁴...you shall be the father of a multitude of nations.

And so that new role goes hand in hand with the new name we see in verse 5. Look at the name that he gives him, Abraham. Which in the original language sounds like if you put together the word for father and the word for many, you brought them together as one and here he is as Abraham. You see, the ritual back in the ancient time period is that when a greater king and a lesser king formed a covenant together, the greater king would often give a new name to the lesser king. To show his authority over him, to demonstrate his commitment. And that's precisely what we see God doing here with Abram. Now, he is Abraham. He's given a new identity, a new role, a new name. And at the heart of that is His call to walk with Him, to be blameless, to live in a way that's pleasing to God. And you'll notice the way that Paul talks about this in Romans chapter 4. I want you to see these verses on the screen beginning in verse 16. Because what Paul does is he shows us the significance of this new name when he says, Romans 4:16,

¹⁶That 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, ¹⁷as 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.

I'm just curious by showing hands. How many y'all remember the old VBS song Father Abraham? Anybody know that one? Father Abraham had many sons. Let's hear it. Many sons had father Abraham and I am one of them and so are you. So let's all praise the Lord. Alright give yourself a hand on that one. Nice work. It speaks to the heart of this new identity at the core of this kingdom character. That he is not the leader of many nations. He's not the king of many nations but the father. He's been invited into the family. He's been united by the covenant. And when that takes place, it sets a trajectory not just for the nation of Israel but

everyone in the hearing of my voice right now. This invitation to be a of the family. To be connected. And Paul tells us in Romans 4 how that happens. It happens by faith. That he is the father of many nations, not just because many nations go out from him but because many nations come in to him by his Son, Jesus Christ. And I want you to notice back in our passage in Genesis 17 that it's not just how it reshapes our kingdom character but also it reshapes our kingdom community.

That's what we're going to notice verse 6 when it says, a description of what type of kingdom community we are called into. And notice several things. Back at the beginning of verse 6, it's a fruitful kingdom. That's why it says, I will make you exceedingly fruitful. And then later on in verse 6, it's a global kingdom. That's why it says, and I will make you into nations. At the end of verse 6, it shows us to say, royal kingdom. That's why it says, king shall come from you. In other words, this is the first promise of a coming king in the Bible. But there's one more. In verse 7, it's an eternal kingdom. That's why it says, I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout the generations for an everlasting covenant. And so what happens here when it speaks about this fruitful kingdom, this global kingdom, this royal kingdom, this eternal kingdom, it's giving us a sense of the invitation that God has for us through His covenant. That it doesn't just reshape who we are. It reshapes where we're going and who we're connected to. That in Jesus Christ, there is a global kingdom community that's coming together. It's one of the reasons I love that we have Duncan here with us all the way from Ireland today. Because we know that the global work that God is doing in Ireland and the work that He's doing right here in Bryan/College Station are all a part of this kingdom community that he speaks of here. Because we're getting this glimpse for the very first time here when it says, I will make you into nations. This global picture of God's covenant people. Every tongue, every tribe, every people, every language coming together as one through the blood of Jesus Christ as He is making all things new. That's what excites us. That in a church like ours and in a community like this that people are welcomed into these doors, received into the arms of a loving Father through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. Regardless of their age, or their race, or their nationality, or their ethnicity, or their language, or any other factor. They are brought into the family because of this eternal promise. And if that's true, it should also help us understand the third dimension of how this covenant reshapes our lives.

It reshapes not just our kingdom character and our kingdom community but also our kingdom calling. And we see that calling reiterated back in verse 8. What's that calling that he receives there? Well, its the exact same as we saw back in Genesis 12 and Genesis 15. And the way to summarize it as we've been reinforcing each week is that the heart of the covenant is God's people and God's place carrying out God's purpose. And we see that right here in verse 8. Look back at it. Genesis 17 is no different. You see people there at the beginning of verse 8 when it speaks about your offspring. And then we see a place right there in the middle when it talks about the land of Canaan. And then at the end of verse 8 we see that purpose. I will be their God. That's the purpose of our lives. To live our lives in such a way that it reflects that God is our God. And all of these threads that Genesis 17 are bringing together in our kingdom calling we see Paul talk about in Galatians chapter 3 and verse 16. I want you to notice it on the screen. About the way he shows that this particular verse, Genesis 17:8 finds its fulfillment in Jesus. Here's what it says,

¹⁶Now, the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. Notice, it does not say, “And to offsprings, plural, referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring, who Christ.

Paul sees what we see this morning. That this covenant that God gives to Abraham wasn't just meant for him. It was meant for you and for me and for all those who put their trust in the son of Abraham, Jesus Christ. That one day, Abraham would have an offspring who would fulfill the covenant commitments and receive the covenant blessings to dispense the covenant promise to his people. And when we recognize that reality, when we embrace that covenant, it reshapes our commitment. But I want you to see how the text goes on back in verse 9. We don't just see the shape of the covenant but also the sign of the covenant reshapes our commitment to God. So, let's read. Now, starting down in verse 9 and notice how this portion finishes out down to verse 14 when it says,

⁹And God said to Abraham, “As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. ¹⁰This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. ¹¹You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. ¹²He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, ¹³both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. ¹⁴Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.”

So, if you were to look throughout Scripture, over and over again, you see a pattern that when God seals a covenant, He gives a sign for the covenant. And you can imagine in this moment when Abraham is hearing from God and He says that He's going to give to him a sign for the covenant, he's remembering back to what's happened before him. That when God makes a covenant with Adam in the garden, He gives him Eve. When God makes a covenant with Noah after the flood, He gives him a rainbow. He seen all these things. It's like when you're at Christmas-time and you see a kid in your family open it up and he gets his favorite video game he's really wanted. And then your uncle opens up his big box gift and it's a new pellet smoker he's dreamed of. And you see all the momentum of all these great gifts that are happening and then you unwrap yours and it's underwear and socks. This feels like an underwear and socks kind of moment for Abraham. You're like, “Wait a minute. He gets Eve. He gets a rainbow. And I get what? Where? How is this supposed to be happening? Why me?” Might have been the thought that went through his head in that moment.

So, why circumcision? Of all the things, I mean, it's just uncomfortable to even stand up here before all of you and even discuss the topic. Much less to hear about and the reason is clear. This sign is connected to the purpose of the covenant. You look back at the end of verse 10 when it says, every male among you shall be circumcised. There's a reason for that. That God is pulling all the way back from His original promise of a Messiah in Genesis 3:15. Remember how that Messiah will come? That one day, a seed of the woman will be raised up who will crush the head of the serpent. So, the sign of the covenant is shaped by the nature of the

covenant. That if the deliverer will come through the promised seed, then it makes sense that the seed generating organ of the body would be cut as a sign of the covenant. That's what we find here. That in each moment, it's a reminder to them that God is going to keep that Genesis 3:15 promise. That's why Paul when we go back to Romans, speaks about it this way in Romans 4 down in verse 11. He says that circumcision doesn't just reveal the nature of the promise but the nature of our faith. Look at the screens in Romans 4:11. He says,

¹¹He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well,

So, think about Paul say That God doesn't circumcise, it's not that God circumcises Abraham and then says, "Now, I've seen your faith and you're welcomed into my covenant people." Instead, it's the exact opposite of that reality. That in this case, we saw all the way back in Genesis 15 that God looks at Abram's faith and it's counted to him as righteousness. And as a result of that righteousness, he calls Abraham to take this step of faith in the marking out of circumcision. That it is a reflection of the faith that he already has in Jesus Christ. And what happens here is that the sign shows the significance of the covenant. Maybe the way to make sense of this is to think about that wedding band that's sitting on many of your hands. Somebody can be married without wearing a wedding band, right? In fact, some of you might have even had a situation where you or somebody you know in that wedding ceremony, the minister calls for the best man to give the rings and he starts patting down his, because he can't find it. Does the minister just stop the ceremony and say, "Well, unless and until these rings are present, you cannot be officially married." No. Why? It's because the marriage covenant doesn't depend on the ring. The ring reflects the dependence on the covenant. And that's what this covenant sign of circumcision looks like right here in this moment. That it's not because Abraham has been circumcised that he's now welcomed into the family. Instead, it's a reflection of a reality that's already true. That he has been marked out by this physical marking on his body as part of the family of God. But here's what we need to understand this morning. That this physical marking through circumcision is pointing to a deeper spiritual reality. So look back in verse 11. It gives us a sense of what is going on here when it says,

¹¹You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you.

In other words, this physical marking as we will see as the whole Bible unfolds is pointing to a spiritual marking that each of us need. So, for example, look at two verses with me back to back on the screens. First, Deuteronomy 30 in verse 6 and then, Romans 2, verses 28 and 29. It speaks about how our greatest need is not this physical marking of our bodies but a spiritual marking of our hearts. So, in Deuteronomy chapter 30 in verse 6, it says,

⁶And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

Now, look to the screens for Romans 2, verses 28 and 29. The way that he speaks of this circumcision in the heart. Paul says,

²⁸For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. ²⁹But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

So, the Bible is pointing us to the reality that this physical marking of Abraham and for all the men of Israel from that moment forward is pointing to the need of a deeper spiritual reality. What is it? A circumcision of the heart. What does it mean to have a circumcised heart? That's such a strange term. The way I heard one pastor put it is, a circumcised heart means that what I want to do and what I ought to do are the same thing. You know when someone has a circumcised heart when what they want to do and what they ought to do are the same thing. And so, when Paul is speaking here, he's speaking of the significance not of a physical circumcision but a spiritual circumcision. And one of the reasons that we find this subject so uncomfortable to think about. It's because it's disgusting. It's personal. It's intimate. It feels dirty. And there's a reality spiritually underneath that. That that is pointing us to the same truth about our own sin. It's disgusting, intimate, personal, shameful, embarrassing, humiliating. We're coming face to face with that reality of our spiritual need. That in our sin, we are dead before God. We deserve judgment and condemnation unless He makes a way. Not through a physical transformation but a spiritual one. So, look back at the passage with me now. How did this process take place? Notice that at the beginning of verse 12, it tells us what's supposed to happen when it says that it is, that this act of circumcision is given on the eighth day. Now, how many days were there in creation? Seven. Six days God works, then He rests. What's the significance of this eighth day? The scholars all believe this is a mark of new creation. That a new day is dawning through this covenant sign. And who is it for? Look at the second half of verse 12. Every male throughout your generations. Whether those in your house or those who are foreigners. In other words, it just for Abram. It's not just for Israel. But for everyone who is in the home. Again, showing us that global picture of the Gospel. That that covenant promise doesn't stop just with ethnic Israel but goes out to all the nations. And look down at verse 14 at what happens to those who don't uphold the sign. You'll see it at the end there. It says,

¹⁴...he shall be cut off from his people, he has broken my covenant.

So, this act is a reminder of the judgment that may come upon us of a threat of judgement that comes from a failure to keep the covenant. And what we need to notice as we look at this process is that the process of circumcision helps us to point ahead to the purpose of that circumcision. Why did it exist? All of these covenant signs, these covenant realities were coming together to find their fulfillment in the son of Abraham, Jesus Christ. Remember what Luke 2 tells us. That He was circumcised on the eighth day. And that through His death, He makes this covenant offer available; not just to ethnic Israel, but to all nations. And how does it happen? On the cross. He is hung on the tree. Cut off from God. He takes the payment for our sins. He takes the punishment we deserve. He dies in our place. He faces the kind of wrathful judgment that Genesis 17:14 speaks of here. He hangs on that cross naked. Exposed before the world. And God brings the piercing for our transgressions upon Him so that by His wounds we might be healed. That's the purpose of this covenant sign right here in Genesis 17, as uncomfortable as it may make us feel this morning.

And there's another spiritual reality that this points to for us as the new covenant church. What we know is that in Jesus Christ, the circumcised one whose spiritual circumcision on the cross makes a way for us in salvation. Now, the sign of the covenant is longer circumcision but baptism. So, right here this morning, up in these waters, we had to go through the waters of baptism. And in that act, it is showing us the sign of the new covenant in Christ. That as they stand there and as they are plunged under the waters, it's a reminder of the way that we have been plunged under the waters of judgement for our sins. That in Christ through His blood God is cleansing us from all unrighteousness. And when they are raised above those waters, it reminds us of the way we've been raised to walk in newness of life. That the cross couldn't keep Him. The grave couldn't hold Him. And now, we receive the free offer of the Gospel. So, if you were to think back in Abraham's time period, it would make no sense at all for a young Jewish boy to be a part of the people of God but not receive the sign of the covenant in circumcision. It would just be unnatural. It would be no point to that. And that same reality is true for you and me when it comes to the covenant sign of baptism. That God has given us the gift of baptism as a sign and just as it would make no sense for one of those Jewish boys not to experience that sign of the covenant, the same is true today. God is calling us to profess our faith publicly through believer's baptism to mark us out, to publicly testify to what He has already done through the son of Abraham, Jesus Christ, in our lives.

Curious, how many of you are familiar with a group of Aggies who are now well-known YouTubers called Dude Perfect. Any Dude Perfect folks out there? Well, earlier this week, Dude Perfect came out with a brand-new video called Wedding Stereotypes. If you haven't seen it, you will laugh to no end as you watch it. It's just taking moments to replay some of the different ways that things stand out, are familiar, the typical things you might experience in a wedding environment. Maybe it's, they highlight the long winded pastor. Maybe some of y'all are thinking about that this morning. I don't know. Or the awkward best man speech, or the poorly fitting suits or tuxedos the guys squeeze into because they got the sizes wrong. Or the outdoor wedding that's way too hot or way too cold or raining. Or maybe front of mind for some of y'all would be that bridezilla who just has that intense anxiety and overreaction to the moment on that big day. Probably go through about 15 or 20 wedding stereotypes that all of us would laugh at because we've seen it before. But you know, in that big group of stereotypes that they highlighted in this recent video, you know there's one stereotype I didn't see there. I didn't see any example of someone who entered into the covenant of marriage and then walked away from that ceremony and went back to live exactly how they were living before it happened. Why? Because that would make no sense. We don't see that. It would make no sense for someone to say, "I do," and then after that, to not share their home, not share their bank account, not share their life, not share their love. The covenant reshapes the commitment. The same reality is true for us spiritually. That if we've been bought with a price, if we've been united to Jesus by faith, God has changed you and me through that covenant. And He's calling us to go all in with that reality. You don't have to wonder if Abraham was all in with God. There's very few things in life that could show your dedication more than what he went through with this sign. He wasn't just saying he was in, he was saying he was all in with his commitment.

And we've been journeying through Genesis since the start of this year. We're 25 sermons into this incredible book. And we're right at this seem in the heart of the story of Abraham where after this passage, it begins to pivot from the focus on Abraham now to his son Isaac. And in this

period of time, we are sensing a leading from God right here at Central to take a short step away from Genesis and to wrestle with the reality we see on display through Abraham right here in the text. What does it mean to be all in for Jesus? Starting next Sunday for the next several weeks after that, we're going to step away from Genesis and wrestle with one specific question. What would happen if all of us went all in for Jesus? We see what happens in the life of Abraham. We know what happens in the life of the early church. What I know is God can do abundantly more than we can ask or think if we go all in with Him, as Genesis 17 calls us to do. Let's pray towards that end right now.

Father, Your word tells us to seek first the kingdom and then all these things will be added onto you. Lord, so many things pulling at our hearts, leading us astray, calling us to a relationship with You driven more out of convenience than commitment. And I ask you, Lord, in this moment that You would reshape our hearts, that You would renew our spirits, that You would refine our lives so that we can return to seeking You above all else. We ask these things in the precious blood of Your Son Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.