

God's Faithfulness to Abraham

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again to chapter 17 in the book of Genesis, Genesis chapter 17, and we read from the beginning.

When Abram was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, I am God Almighty, walk before me and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.

Then Abram fell on his face, and God said to him, so on. We've highlighted before of how God will always fulfill his purposes, and that we cannot put pressure on God to make things happen quicker. Sometimes we get agitated, we get frustrated, sometimes we're in a hurry for things to happen, but our attitude and our desperation for things to happen is not going to make God change his timetable.

He is never going to be pressurized by us, because God is working everything out according to his own particular timetable. And God's silence doesn't mean that God isn't interested, or that God isn't taking note, or that God isn't involved, or even that God isn't working.

[1 : 34] We're never to assume that, because we're not, as it were, hearing from God. We're not hearing his words speaking to us. He seems to be distant and remote.

All these kind of things. We're not to assume, then, that God has, as it were, left us, that he's not caring anymore. Because there was a period of silence in Abram's life, which was 13 years.

Now, I don't believe that in these 13 years, that God was not revealing himself to Abram. I don't believe that there wasn't communication between Abram and God.

I believe that Abram was continuing to worship, and God was drawing close to him. But this is specifically with regard to the promise that was made of Abraham having a son with Sarah.

We find God coming again 13 years later. Now, you try and put yourself in Abram's shoes. God has given you a promise. And 13 years of silence regarding that promise.

[2 : 44] And, in fact, through these 13 years, I could imagine Abram and Sarah saying, Look, every single year is making the likelihood of this promise becoming more and more unlikely.

Until it reached the point when both of them knew that it was, from a human point of view, going to be impossible for that particular promise to be fulfilled.

That Abraham and Sarah had reached that point in their life when they could no longer expect to be father and mother of a new baby.

So this is where they are. And it's at that point, 13 years of silence, that God appears to Abram. And God appears to Abram, and he declares to him, he said, I am God Almighty.

Now, this is a very powerful name, El Shaddai, which really means, when you break down all the different definitions of it, I am the all-powerful, all-sufficient, almighty God who can do anything and can meet every need.

[3 : 58] That's basically what God Almighty means. And it really is quite extraordinary when you stop and you think of that. This is how God is defining himself at this particular moment to Abraham.

And this is the same God that you and I are worshipping today. Exact same God, he has not changed in any way at all. And sometimes we forget that we come into the presence of this all-powerful, almighty God who can do anything.

And all we have to do is reflect for one moment on what God did with regard to this world. We have to remember there was a point when there was nothing.

Nothing but emptiness and darkness. God spoke into that darkness and God said, let there be light. God had planned what he was going to do and he brought everything into being.

The great mountain ranges, the great oceans, the lion, the sparrow. You, me. And when you look at the intricacy and the marvel just even of the human body, it's unbelievable.

[5 : 14] And yet, this is what God did by the word of his power. He spoke into being. And sometimes we forget that, maybe as we come to church, just who it is that we're coming to worship. He is the God who holds our life in his hand. He has measured out our days. The Bible tells us that. That there was a day to be born and there is a day for us to leave this world as well. And we will. You and I don't know when. God does. It's all mapped out in his plan and in his purposes. And so this is the God who comes to Abraham and God who says to him again and indicates who he is.

Now, there's nothing that God cannot do apart from there's two things God can't do. He cannot lie. Bible tells us that.

And he can't deny himself. That means that he can't do anything that is inconsistent with who he is. But it's interesting, as God comes to Abraham, he comes at this particular point saying, I am the almighty God who can do anything.

[6 : 27] Nothing is too hard for me to do. Because, you know, when God appears to Abraham, he comes revealing himself in different ways, always at a point where Abraham really needs him.

You remember after there was a battle with the kings, and Abraham had won that battle, he no doubt he felt very vulnerable in a strange land.

And God came to him and he said, Abraham, I am your shield. That must have been music to Abraham's ear. The one thing that he was probably feeling, I need protection after this battle. Because what have they all gang up on me? The Lord says, I am your shield. After, remember when he had been offered all the goods from Sodom, remember the king of Sodom had said to Abraham, take everything.

I just want the people. You can have all the wealth, all, everything is yours. Abraham said, no, I won't even take, I won't even take a lace from your shoes, or a shoe latch.

[7 : 31] I won't take anything. And no doubt, or I'm not saying that that was the case, but maybe afterwards Abraham was saying, well, what an opportunity I had there.

I can imagine Satan coming to him and saying, you know, Abraham, you really blew it. You could be the wealthiest man in the world if you got all that together. But God comes to Abraham and he says, remember what he said?

Abraham, Abraham, I am your exceeding great reward. That's who I am. I am your exceeding great reward.

Abraham, you don't need anything other than that when you have me. So you see, God is coming to Abraham and he's, it's so timeless each time he comes in what he is saying.

So this time he's coming and he's saying, I am the God who can fulfill your every need. So that's really what he's saying. So here's these 13 years of silence.

[8 : 30] But as we said, God was still working in Abraham's life. And sometimes it's in the silence that God does his best work. Don't you think for one moment in your life that just because you don't seem to be developing, you know, when you start out as a Christian, you're very, very conscious of just God round you and supporting you and helping you.

And it's, it's a very special time. I suppose it's kind of like when a little baby begins to walk for the first time. And over that period, mums and dads are always around that little child in case he or she falls.

Yes, that's them getting on their way but they're there always to support. But after a wee while, then they pull back because the little one's getting stronger on his or her feet.

And God doesn't pull back as it were. But as we go on in the Christian faith, he is allowing us to discover more and more of himself and ourselves but it's not as it were so much hands on.

And sometimes we think at that period, oh the Lord's left me. But he hasn't. He's watching us all the time. He's caring for us all the time. He's working in us.

[9 : 55] And sometimes we need these periods of silence because you know in the course of a year in the seasons we have our spring and we have our summer.

And these are kind of our brighter seasons, our energetic seasons. But we also have our autumns and we have our winters. But you know we need our winters as well. And it's I believe it's the same in the Christian life.

That there are the winters as well. And sometimes it's in the winter of our life that God does things. Sometimes in the silence God is doing things that he couldn't be doing or wouldn't be doing in us at any other time.

So I believe that that is how God has been working in the life of Abraham. So God now says to Abraham this is who I am.

I am God Almighty. Now for you this is what you are to do. You are to walk before me and be blameless. And this is how God wants his people to progress in life by walking.

[11:02] Now again the Bible speaks to us of different Christian activities. There's running, there's fighting, there's wrestling, there's different things like that. But the main activity of the Christian life is to walk.

We walk. And we walk in so many many different ways. You know when we run we can cover the ground a lot quicker. If you are doing a sprint you cover the ground very quickly but you get very breathless.

You cannot sustain a sprint for a long time. For a marathon you can cover the ground a long distance for 26 plus miles.

That covers a lot of running. But you take a good while to recover. The beauty about walking is you can cover a fair distance and you actually through walking get stronger.

So this is why the Bible so often talks to us about walking. The Christian is somebody who walks. He's walking or she's walking. And there are lots of examples of it.

[12:04] Say for instance it says walk in wisdom. Walk in the fear of the Lord. Walk in God's ways. Walk humbly with your God.

We're told to walk about Zion. It says take heed to walk in my law. Walk as children of light. Walk in the spirit.

Walk in love. Let us walk honestly. These are all things that are said to us in the Bible. So you see that's just a very small selection.

But you can see how walking is such an integral part of the Christian life. And so we find here that Abram is to walk before God.

Now we often tend to think of walking with God. And again that was what Abram was doing. It's what you and I do. We walk with God.

[13:05] Because Abram walked with God the Bible tells us that he was turned the friend of God. It's a wonderful description. Imagine having on your tombstone on your gravestone when you die the friend of God.

Well that's what the Bible says of Abram. The friend of God. and you say to yourself that must be wonderful but Jesus actually said he said to the disciples yes your servants but now I call you friends.

And so all of us in the Lord Jesus Christ are now friends of Jesus. And it's a wonderful wonderful privilege because friends are those who share.

you share things with friends. You tell friends things. You involve your life with your friends. And so Jesus says I want you to involve your life with me.

I want to be involved in your life. And that's what the Lord does. Sometimes we forget the tremendous privilege that we have. So that's the idea of walking with and that's what Abram was doing.

[14:22] He was walking with God but this time God says to him, Abraham, I want you to walk before me. Now if you walk before somebody or in front of somebody then that person, you're very aware that that person is looking on you because you are in their gaze.

You are in front of them. And that in a sense is what God is saying to Abram. Yes, you're walking with me but I also want you to walk before me.

And to be aware that my eye is upon you all the time. I am the God who searches the heart. I am the God who sees all things.

And we've got to remember that. That God is a God who sees absolutely every single thing about us. He sees our attitudes, our motives, why we do what we do.

He sees our plans. He understands the motives behind our plans. You know, we can do things that look good, but our motive can be completely wrong. God knows why we do what we do.

[15:34] He is a God who looks down at us approvingly or disapprovingly. He is a God who will say, I'm going to bring justicement to my children because of what they're doing.

God is looking all the time and he is assessing everything. Walk before me and be blameless.

Now, that doesn't mean that he's not to sin. And this word, walk before me and be blameless, is the result of walking before God.

God is saying, Abraham, as you walk before me, as you are conscious of my eyes upon you, every step you take, the result will be that your life will be blameless.

Now, that word blameless doesn't mean sinless. In this context, it means walking in a way of integrity, walking in a way of honesty, walking in a sound way, that you're dealing, you're living, your life in a way of integrity, a way of honesty, of completeness, that's really what it means.

[16:54] And so, that is what God is saying to Abraham. And what the Lord is saying to Abraham is the exact same thing as he's saying to us as well.

Because you and I must remember that every day we are living before God. He's watching us all the time. and when we are living like that, it gives us a God awareness so that we know that even the providence that we're going through is his providence for us.

Even although we don't understand the providence, we know he's in control, that he's God.

Sometimes these providences are really hard to understand, but he is in control.

And again, when we walk before him, it causes us to walk with a sense of awe and a sense of humility because it causes us to reflect upon who the Lord actually is.

And it also reminds us that as we walk through this world as Christians, that we represent him. Now that's quite a thought.

[18:08] Jesus kept saying this. The apostles kept saying it. You know, you're not your own. You no longer belong to yourself. When Jesus comes into your life, you've handed over to him because you are an ambassador for him in this world.

You are his representative in this world. Wherever you go, you represent him. And it's a solemn thought. It's a challenging thought.

Well, all that is involved in walking before him. And so God comes to Abram and he tells Abram what he has to do. And again he tells him and he says to him, you know, Abram, I am going to change your name.

Your name was Abram, which means exalted father. Possibly Abram had come from a royal line, I don't know. But he said your name is now going to be changed to Abraham, which means the father of a multitude or the father of nations.

And God was going to do something wonderful in Abraham and Sarah, we'll see in a minute, Sarah's life. He was going to make them fruitful. They were dead in their bodies, so to speak, with regard to becoming parents.

[19:25] But God was going to change that. God was going to bring all covenant blessings out through them, through this. And there's a spiritual lesson here.

You see, it's only when God is working in our life that real fruit can come. The fruit of the spirit.

Remember how we're told in Galatians, we have the fruit of the spirit.

Well, we cannot have the fruit in our spirit until the spirit comes into our heart, into our life. And the spirit comes into our life when we're born again. Spirit comes forever.

Spirit doesn't just come and say, right, I want to do a wee work in this passion, and then go away.

The Holy Spirit comes to work within our heart, within our life, and remains, abides, forever.

The third passion of the Godhead lives in you as a believer forevermore. And so, this is what the spirit is doing. The spirit is working within it, producing fruit.

[20:27] And it's only the spirit that can produce the fruit within the believer. And it was only God at this particular time, at this juncture in their lives, because as far as parentage was concerned, becoming new parents, becoming a new father and a new mother, it had become into the realms of the impossibility, but God was going to work, and he was going to show and say, I'm going to do it.

And that's exactly what is that. Everything in the Bible is showing, there are spiritual lessons over and over again. And so God has said, this is what's going to happen, and he demanded, of course, we read that, of a particular sign in the flesh of every male, and this was part of the covenant.

And then God said to Sarah, your name is going to be changed as well, you're going to become Sarah, which means princess, and again, which was a very fitting name, name, because she was going to be the mother of nations, and she was going to be the mother of kings, and such like, and of course, the direct line to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And when God told Abraham what was going to happen, he fell to the ground and he laughed.

That's what happened. Abraham burst out, he just laughed.

Now I don't know, we cannot say categorically what all was in that laughter. I think there was a sense of being utterly overwhelmed. There would be a sense of, I almost think, maybe a wee sense

of doubt.

[22 : 01] Can this really be? There would be a sense of this, just how incredible it all was. There would be a sense of joy and euphoria. What God had said was, it was just too good to be true.

So Abraham laughed. The next chapter, when God comes again, we find that Sarah laughs. And it's very interesting that the baby that they're going to have, Isaac, and we're told that this is what the name of the baby is going to be, Isaac.

Isaac means laughter. So that God has turned and he has brought laughter into the latter end of this family.

After the heartbreak, after the sorrows, after the difficulties, after all the traumas and trials, he turns things round. And that's what God so often does.

That's what we're going to sing in Psalm 126. When Zion's bondage, God turned back, as men that dreamed were we, then filled with laughter was our mouth, our tongue with melody.

[23 : 11] glory. Because that's what God so often does. You know, at the end of the day, for the believer, we're told that they should be brought with joy and mirth into the palace of the king, forever to abide.

At his right hand there are pleasures forevermore. Everybody wants pleasure in this world. It's natural to us. We want to be happy. We want things to go well.

everybody wants pleasure and whatever pleasure ultimately is. But when we feel great, when pleasure is, we all know pleasure cannot last in this world.

Because of sin, because of all the sadnesses and sorrows and there are things always going wrong. Every day is not a day of constant happiness and pleasure.

We all know that. But in glory it will be. it will be an environment of complete pleasure, complete happiness, of complete joy, of complete laughter, mirth on every side.

[24 : 20] It's a wonderful, wonderful prospect. What a thought. This is what the Bible holds out to us. The Bible in fact makes it very clear there are two destinies, heaven and hell.

The hell is, the thought of it is weeping, wailing, sorrow, heaven on the other hand is eternal bliss of joy. Today, are you walking before God?

Are you walking with God? Very important question. Because if you're walking with God and walking before God, you're on the right road and you're going in the right direction and you're going to be with him forever.

If you're not, it's time to get onto the right road. It's time to take his hand, which is outstretched to you today, offering himself again to you.

In the gospel, let us pray. Oh Lord, our God, we ask that you will bless us. We give thanks for your word, a word which so often encourages, a word that strengthens, a word that challenges, a word that rebukes.

[25 : 31] O Lord, our God, we pray that as we've come under this word, that it will have done us good. O Lord, be gracious and merciful to us and take us to our home safely.

Bless a cup of tea, coffee in the hall afterwards and do us good and take away our sin in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to conclude singing in Psalm 126 from the Scottish Psalter, Psalm 126 from the Scottish Psalter.

Psalm 126 from the Scottish Psalter, that's on page 419.

When Zion's bondage God turns back as men that dreamed were we, then filled with laughter was our mouth, our tongue with melody. Then they among the heathen said, the Lord great things for them hath wrought.

The Lord hath done great things for them whence joy to us is brought. As streams of water in the south out bondage Lord recall, who sow in tears a reaping time of joy, in joy they shall.

[26 : 39] That man who bearing precious seed in going forth doth mourn, he doubtless bringing back his sheaves rejoicing shall return. Psalm 126 the whole sound of Junest Dainfield.

When Zion's bondage caught turn back as men that dreamed were we, then filled with laughter water was our mouth, our tongue with melody.

They among the heathen, said the Lord, great things for them hath wrought.

The Lord hath done great things for us, whence joy to us is brought.

As streams of water in the south our bondage Lord recall, whose soul in tears our reaping time of joy and joy they shall.

[28 : 18] That man who bearing precious seed in going forth doth mourn, he doubtless bringing back his sheaves rejoicing shall return.

Now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore. Amen.