

God Appears to Abram

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[0:00] Genesis 17, and we'll read the first 14 verses of this chapter. I am God Almighty.

Walk before me and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers. Abram fell face down, and God said to him, As for me, this is my covenant with you.

You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram. Your name will be Abraham. For I have made you a father of many nations.

I will make you very fruitful. I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.

The whole land of Canaan where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you, and I will be their God.

[1:37] Then God said to Abraham, As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come.

This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you. The covenant you are to keep. Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.

For the generations to come, every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner, those who are not your offspring.

Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant.

Any uncircumcised male who has not been circumcised in the flesh will be cut off from his people. He has broken my covenant.

[2:48] Let's pray once more. O Lord, we are your people, the sheep of your pasture.

We're all gathered here now to hear what you have to say to us. Come and feed us. Come and strengthen our pastor. And strengthen us to hear and to obey and to worship.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Pastor Jason. A lot of you were involved in wedding planning this summer.

And so you probably noticed that as the big day got closer and closer, your to-do list didn't get shorter and shorter. Instead, it got longer and longer.

Because some things you just can't do as soon as you would like. You can't do ahead of time. And so the last week, the last few days, are the busiest of all.

[4:06] A lot of stuff gets cramped in those last few hours into that little space. And then all of a sudden, the day is there. And Abraham, Abram's been waiting for 25 years for God to fulfill his promise.

And as Abram turns 99, the corner on 99, and he's starting to head to 100, God gets really busy. And last week, we saw Hagar and Ishmael and God's mercy on Hagar.

But as chapter 17 opens, that was 13 years ago. It's 13 years of silence. Life has gone on.

But now, the narrative, the story, is about to slow down a whole lot. Chapters 17 through 20 all fit into this one last year before Isaac shows up.

And so God has a lot of work to do. His to-do list, he has a lot to do on his to-do list before Isaac gets here. He has to talk to Abraham.

[5:18] Abram. He has to change his name. He has to talk to Sarah. He has to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. He has to rescue Lot. He has to rescue Abraham again.

He has to work a miracle. And then, all of a sudden, Isaac is born. The long-expected son shows up. And so now it's T minus 10 seconds on the countdown. The rocket is on the launch pad. And the countdown is on its way. And it starts with God appearing to Abram. Now, chapter 17 has two sides of it. What God is going to do for Abraham. And then how Abraham is supposed to respond. What he's supposed to do to respond to God's amazing grace to him. How he's supposed to live. And that's a question that we all face. As Christians, that's a question that we all face. And that we struggle with. [6:21] Because the Christian life is meant to be lived in light of the gospel. And so, God is doing something wonderful for Abraham.

And he has to live in a certain way. And God has done something, is doing something wonderful for us. And we are called to live in a certain way as well. Paul commanded the Philippians, whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. So, what does it mean to live by faith? What does it mean to live in a manner worthy of the gospel? That's what we're going to talk about tonight.

That's what you see in chapter 17 in these first 14 verses. And as we talk about this, as we go through this, we're going to learn three things. The first is that God demands reverence from you. God demands reverence from you. Second, God's promises change you. And then third, God wants your heart. So, God demands reverence from you.

[7:28] God's promises change you. And then, God wants your heart. So, first, we're going to see that God demands reverence from you. In verse 2, God says, I am here.

I'm going to confirm my covenant between me and you. I will greatly increase your numbers. And so, God is renewing that covenant. He's reminding Abraham of what he has promised before. But as he confirms his covenant, you see in verse 1, He tells Abraham how he is to live in light of this promise.

In light of living in the goodness of God being wonderful and gracious to Abraham. What is he supposed to do? Well, he says in verse 1, I am God Almighty.

Walk before me and be blameless. God demands reverence from you. From every believer.

[8:27] God says, walk before me. Now, what does that mean? Well, it means consciously, consciously walk in my presence.

Now, aren't we always in God's presence? Aren't we always in God's presence? Yes, in Him we live and we move and we have our being. God is everywhere.

He's here now. He knows when you sit down and when you rise up. For the very reason that you know that I am here. Because I'm before you and you are before me.

In the same way, you live before God. You live in God's presence because God is everywhere.

Now, some of you may sneak around and do things that you should not do.

Children, you sneak cookies. Or maybe you look at things that you should not look at. And you do those things and you're concerned about not letting people know.

[9:30] Not letting mom and dad know. Not letting my wife know. Not letting the people at church find out. But the reality is that we do all that we do in the presence of God.

God. Now, for some of you, that is a legitimate fear. It should be.

And it scares you. It makes you think about what you're doing. But for some of you, that probably doesn't matter because you don't really believe it.

You know it maybe up here. You would agree to it if I said, is God everywhere? And you would say, of course, yes. But it's not a powerful reality in your life.

It doesn't have the ability to make you not sin. Or it doesn't have the ability to change your behavior in any way. God is not big in your heart. But here, God says to Abram, I'm God Almighty.

[10:29] El Shaddai. Which means God the most powerful. And as you live, think about who I am. Think about who I am. Revere me.

Respect me. Walk before me. And be blameless. Now, brothers and sisters, the goodness of the gospel goes hand in hand with reverence and holiness.

Some people think that the gospel is a license to live however you want. But that's not what God demanded of Abraham.

It wasn't Abraham, I'm going to bless you so now you can do whatever you want. It was Abram, I'm blessing you. So now walk before me and be blameless.

Now, why does God demand holiness from every person that he calls into fellowship with himself? Every person that he blesses? Well, because he's holy.

[11:30] He's holy. When Jesus Christ reconciled you to God, he reconciled you to a holy God.

God didn't lower the bar of his holiness the least bit when he reconciled you to himself. Christ Jesus reconciled you to a holy God.

And so walk worthy of him. Walk worthy of him. Consciously remember who has saved you. And that's why you need this word.

Because you need to have its truth. And it has such a high view of God. And you need that filtering through your mind and settling on your hearts.

You need to remember who God is. Christ saved you to make you holy. The Holy Spirit lives within you to make you holy. He's blessed you in order to make you like him.

[12:34] But don't mishear me. When God calls Abraham to walk before him and be blameless, he is not calling Abraham to walk on eggshells in constant terror.

He's not calling him to always be living with his guilt and with his failures, scraping the insides of himself, always aware that I am a horrible, wretched sinner, and just feeling that as terrible, as a failure.

And I'm afraid that's how some of you will hear that. That this call to reverence and this call to holiness would only discourage you. Because maybe you say, when I think about God always being before God, I just think about all my failures.

I think about all my sin. I feel beat up as it is. And actually not thinking about God is one of the only ways that I can cope. So now you're telling me to walk before him.

But brothers and sisters, remember, as you remember, who has called you? Remember, this is the God who called Abraham to himself when Abraham hadn't done anything worthy of that.

[13:54] He was a God of mercy and of grace. He was a God of mercy and grace to Hagar. In chapter 16, he's a God of mercy who forgives us of our sins and our transgressions, who throws them into the deepest sea and remembers them no more.

And he does that all for Jesus' sake. And it's really only as you walk before God, trusting in Jesus, relying on him, that you will walk before him in holiness.

That you would be blameless. Because the joy of the Lord is our strength, isn't it? The joy of the Lord. The joy of knowing Jesus' righteousness and knowing that he loved me when I was a dirty sinner, but he loved me and he gave himself for me.

The joy of knowing that because of Jesus, I'm God's son or daughter. And so this walking before the Lord is the walking of a child with a father.

Under his love. Under his care. Yes, he will discipline us, but he loves us. Holiness comes from faith working through love.

[15:13] When we are believing in the love of Jesus and our hearts respond, that's when we are holy. And so this demand for holiness is not a call away from Jesus.

It's a call to Jesus. And when we come to Jesus, he leads us in reverence. He leads us in holiness. He puts that fear of God in our hearts.

And so that's the first thing that we learn tonight. God demands reverence. Secondly, God's promises change who we are.

God's promises change who we are. Look at verse 4. As for me, this is my covenant with you. You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram. Your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.

[16:14] Now, because of God's amazing grace, Abram's identity changes. It changes who he is.

So Abram goes from exalted father, which is pretty good, to father of many nations. Because God is going to do something so good and so amazing and so remarkable and so wonderful for Abraham, he can't be Abram anymore.

He has to be Abraham. His identity has to go through a revolution. It can't stay the same anymore. He can't stay the same. And so God changes his name.

Now, you know, in the Bible, names aren't just labels, meaningless labels that we put on things. They signified who a person was.

They signified what the person was. And so when God changes a name, so when he changes Jacob to Israel, it was a sign of Jacob being changed in who he was.

[17:18] He changes who a person is. He changes their identity. Now, when you're born again, you don't get a new birth certificate, but you do get a new identity.

Because Abraham is the father of the faithful. What God does for Abraham, he does for all of Abraham's children. See, Abraham is sort of the template.

He's the picture of every believer. And what God does for Abraham, he's going to do for every believer. He's sort of, it's writ large. It's a big picture.

It's showing you what has happened to you. So what God does for Abraham, he does for all who believe. He changes who they are.

He changes their identity. Now, dear believer, when God saved you, he changed who you are. And I want to show you this from Colossians chapter 2.

[18:26] So if you would please turn in your Bibles to Colossians chapter 2. Colossians chapter 2.

This change of identity is a big deal to Paul. It's at the very center of, near the very center of his theology.

And it definitely is the foundation for his moral teaching of why we should do what we should do and what we should do.

So look at Colossians chapter 2, verse 20. Now, and I don't want to go into this too much, but just look at the amazing things that Paul says just so effortlessly.

Since you died with Christ. You died with Christ. Has that ever sunk in with you? That you died with Christ.

[19:31] Now look at chapter 3, verse 1. Since then, you have been raised with Christ. Set your hearts on things above where Christ is.

So you died with Christ. You also rose with Christ. You have been raised with Christ. Now look at verse 3. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

Now, just think about that. We use those words, but I don't know how much we really think about them. Really, I died.

I died. I rose again. Well, when did I die? When did I rise again?

Well, I did it when Christ did it. I died when Christ died. Now, that only makes sense.

[20:33] And we can only come to grips with that, or think about that. That can only be true if I have been united with Christ. United with Him.

Connected with Him. And so, that in some way, His identity has become my identity. Now, think about what Paul is saying.

Christ's past is my past. So, He died, and I died, and I died with Him. His death and resurrection is part of my past.

And my life now is hid with Christ in God. And so, like a branch, I've been grafted in to Jesus Christ. And so, now the history of that tree is my history.

And the power of that tree is my power. And so, the life, and the death, and the resurrection, the past, and the future of that tree is mine.

[21:36] Because I've been connected to it. It belongs to me. And that's why in verse 4, He says, when Christ, who is your life, appears, then you will also appear with Him in glory.

So, His future, His future glorious unveiling is my future because I'm connected to Him. And so, brothers and sisters, when the Gospel invaded your life, and when God rescued you, and when God started working powerfully in your life, He united you with Christ, and in some profound way, Christ became your life.

You put Him on. His identity became your identity. And that change of identity, that union with Christ, is why we put to death whatever belongs to our earthly natures.

They just don't fit anymore with who we are. So, brothers, why, in this passage, put to death, verse 5, whatever belongs to your earthly natures, sexual immorality.

And so, brothers, why should you say no to lust? Say no to sexual immorality because they just don't fit with who you are anymore in Christ.

[22:55] Maybe you remember the story of Augustine, of Hippo. He was from Africa in the 4th or 5th century AD, and he was a lustful, wild man.

He would hook up with women, and that's just how he lived. He lived for pleasure like that. That was what he liked, that's what he loved, that's what he lived for. And after God saved him, he was walking through the streets one day, and a woman who he used to know, used to be with, a former lover, saw him, said hi, and started flirting with him, and started tempting him, and he said, no

thanks, and he walked away.

And she thought, well, maybe he didn't recognize me. Maybe he doesn't know who I am. And so she called out and she said, Augustine, it is I.

And he said, yes, I know, but it is not I. It's not me anymore. That person is gone.

So sisters, why shouldn't you live for the opinions of others, the opinions of men, the opinions of other women, and covetousness, and greed, because that just doesn't fit with who you are anymore in Christ.

[24 : 22] You died, and you rose again in Christ. And he is your life. And he is your present. He is your past, and your future. And you aren't you anymore.

Now, so when God saves us, he changes who we are. He changes our identity. He just doesn't change our destiny.

Changes who we are. That's what he does for Abram. Abram, you can't be you anymore. I'm going to do such wonderful things with you. You have to be Abraham now. On your own, you can never be the father of many nations.

But I am going to bless you and make you into something that you never could have been. And so God's promises change us. And so what does it mean then to live in the light of God's promises and God's blessing in the light of the gospel and a manner worthy of the gospel?

Well, you live according to your new identity. You live as dead. You live as raised. You clothe yourself in Jesus Christ and you make no provision for the flesh.

[25 : 39] So when the flesh comes and it's still a part of us and it says live like this and we want to, we say that's not me anymore. I died and I rose again with him.

I'm dead to you and I live my life to God. So what does it mean to live in light of the gospel? It means living according to who God has made you.

Now thirdly, God wants your heart. God wants your heart. God demands reverence. His promises change you and now he wants your heart.

Keep your finger here in Colossians because we're going to turn back here. but turn back to Genesis chapter 17 and we're going to read what God wanted of Abraham and it's from verse 9. We're going to read a few verses here. Then God said to Abraham and that's interesting because that's the first time that God has used that name.

[26 : 46] The Bible has used that name. He addresses them by his new identity. You're now Abraham. I'm going to do great things for you. So as for you, you must keep my covenant.

You and your descendants after you for the generations to come. This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you. The covenant you are to keep. Every male among you shall be circumcised.

You are to undergo circumcision and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. So God says I'm going to do magnificent things for you.

I'm going to make kings come from you. I'm going to make nations come from you. And that's what I'm going to do. Now Abraham here is what you do. You circumcise yourself and all your descendants should be too.

Now the important question for us is why? Why circumcision? circumcision? What is it supposed to mean?

[27 : 46] What does that have to do with us? Why circumcision? Well circumcision was a symbol of death. It was a symbol of death. It was a symbolic cutting off of life.

Of your own life. It was a symbolic giving over of your life. And so when you cut off the flesh of the reproductive organ you symbolically cut off your own life.

And when you did that to an infant you gave them to God. You were giving them over to the Lord. Now you remember Genesis 15.

God walked through the dead animals. There were split animals on each side. And he was saying let me be cut in two if I don't keep this oath this covenant this promise.

If I don't fulfill what I say I'm going to do. Now in circumcision Abraham is responding to God. And he is saying my old life is dead.

[28 : 55] My old life is gone. And my whole life now is given over to you. He was saying I'm dead to all except for you.

And so when God says circumcise yourself he is saying give me your heart. I want all of you. Give me all that you are.

Live only for me. So in light of God's grace and promises and mercy to Abraham he was to give himself to God with complete abandonment.

Circumcision was never meant to just be a mere outward sign. It was symbolic of a person's heart. What they were before God. And so Moses in Deuteronomy 10 says circumcise your hearts and do not be stiff-necked anymore.

And then in Deuteronomy 30 Moses is talking about the new covenant and what God will do. And he says this the Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul and live.

[30 : 06] And so do you see what's underneath this demand for circumcision this command for circumcision God was saying give me your whole life. Give me all of your love.

That's what God wanted. Abraham I'm blessing you. I am your God. Now you be mine. Be all mine. And love me. Now how does that translate to us? what does that mean for you? Well flip back to Colossians flip back to Colossians in chapter two and Paul brings up this matter of circumcision. Colossians two verse nine. for in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form and you have been given fullness in Christ who is the head over every power and authority in him you were also circumcised in the putting off of the sinful nature not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with a circumcision done by Christ having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God who raised him from the dead when you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature God made you alive with Christ so here's a question dear believer do you need to be circumcised does your heart need to be circumcised the answer is no no it doesn't because when you were joined to

Jesus you were circumcised and your parents didn't do it it wasn't done with the hands of men Christ did it so when you joined yourself to Jesus Christ devoted you to God he gave you over to God he consecrated you to God when you united yourself to him and he gave you new life you were once dead he made alive God made alive with Christ and that was what was pictured in your baptism that was what was pictured in your baptism you saw that in verse 12 having been buried with him in baptism Paul links circumcision and baptism together why does he do that because they're both they both symbolize many of the same things in baptism baptism we go through a symbolic death a symbolic burial!

[33 : 11] We symbolically die we're symbolically buried and then we rise again and in our baptism we rise again without old life behind us and a new life we live to God and so in baptism we present ourselves to God as new creatures new creations and we say I've been raised with Christ and the life that he lives he lives to God and so the life that I live I live to God he died to sin once and for all and so I died to sin once for all and so I count myself dead to sin but alive to God through Christ Jesus and so in our baptism we say here I am God here I am the old life is gone the new life is here I will love you and I am alive to you and so brothers and sisters how do you live in the light of God's mercies and God's grace and in the goodness of the gospel well you give him your heart you live as dead to the world you live as dead to sin but alive to him you live as circumcised you live as baptized and there's no in between we're so good at trying to live in both worlds of trying to please the flesh and trying to please the world and live for

Jesus too but that's just not reality if you've been joined to Jesus you have been circumcised you have been baptized you have died and you have been raised again reality is that in Christ that old life and are in your past and they're in the grave Christ has devoted you to God and so count yourselves dead to sin but alive to him and that's going to mean cutting off things it's going to mean cutting off painful painful surgery of saying no to things that we like no to things that our flesh likes because God wants all my heart and so here it is I'm giving it all to him he wants all my love and so I can't spare to give any love to anything else Jesus has my heart and so I gladly pay I gladly put to death the misdeeds of the body and so how do you live according to the gospel well you live as people who have been baptized baptized and not just with water but with the spirit and joined to Jesus now to you who have not believed the call is not to be baptized and go through the water or anything like that it's not even die to sin and love God because those things are impossible those are things that you cannot do the old heart is too much for you the Bible says you're enslaved to sin you're dead in sin and only God can make you alive and God makes people alive by joining them to Jesus and so the command is run to Jesus new life is in him you need a new heart you need to be a new creation you need all those things and those things are found as you are joined to Jesus and it comes from Christ living in you and so lean and give and put all your weight on

Jesus see you don't need self improvement you don't need a few changes in your life you need death and resurrection that's the gospel message nothing else will do and so do you believe that Jesus isn't going to just repaint the walls he's going to throw down the walls he's going to tear up the floor he's going to tear out the studs he's going to put new flooring and new studs he's going to put it upstairs in your house in a basement he's going to totally redo you the old has to go the new has to be put in the old has to die and the new has to come and only Jesus has that kind of power and so come to Jesus and say I have no good thing I can't I don't need a new coat of paint I need a total renovation in me there's nothing good all my good is in you you're all I need and so by faith you say take my life take my life let's pray heavenly father I pray that you would please give us wisdom and understanding for these things the spirit would make these things real to us that our identities have been changed that you have demanded holiness of us you want our hearts thank you that you have done this wonderful work of giving us new life and new birth in Christ and that we aren't what we used to be and so we don't have to do the things that we used to do we are no longer slaves we have died to sin help us to live our lives to

[39 : 13] Jesus unto God help us to live in the fullness of who Christ is to live according to your promises! And what you have said pray that you would forgive us for our self righteousness and willfulness and thinking that just a little more from us would do the trick when you have done something so wonderful for us and joining us to such a mighty savior I pray that we would live that way we would not live as poor but as rich because of what Christ has done and that we would not live as those who are defeated and trampled down when Jesus has risen from the grave and has seated the highest throne and we are seated there with him because we are joined to him so

I pray that we would live out of all that he is for us that our eyes would be turned away from ourselves and turned to him we thank you for him we thank you for the work of the spirit we thank you for the word of God and I pray that you would please bless us as we go and make these things real to us in in Jesus name amen please take your hymnals and turn to hymn 492 hymn 492 and we're going to sing this to a more familiar tune which means that we're going to have to repeat the last phrase hymn 492 please stand may!

Thank you.