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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
July 6, 2014
4th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Acts 4:1-12; Matthew 5:1-6
Hymns: 748; 250; 243; 644 (38:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Genesis 17:1-9

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. 2 And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly." 3 Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: 4 "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. 5 No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. 6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. 7 And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. 8 Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." 9 And God said to Abraham: "As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow Redeemed.

INTRO: A deal is a deal.

It doesn't matter how much time has gone by. Time doesn't always change the terms of the contract. We hear that especially from the Native Americans who signed treaties with the United States that recognized them as sovereign nations and granted them certain rights and privileges, also regarding the land where they lived and the animals that lived there. But it didn't take long before the terms were changed, and then changed again. In recent years the Native Americans sued, and the terms of these treaties have been held up by the courts of the courts as right and binding.

Covenants and contracts are not as most American athletes think of them, subject to change at their whim and fancy. No, legitimate contracts are binding, unless or until one of the parties violates that contract, and thereby nullifies it.

Our text this morning is the record of God confirming the covenant that He had established with Abram, but the terms of this covenant reached far beyond Abraham. --

**THEME: God's Covenant with Abraham
Is the Covenant of Our Salvation.**

It is --

I. A Personal Covenant with Almighty God.

Genesis 17:1-2 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. 2 And

I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.”

The first thing to be noted here is Abram’s age. That is significant because it reveals just how many years had already passed from the time that God first called Abram to come out from among his people and move to the land of Canaan; how long it had been since the Lord had made the initial promises to Abram regarding Abram’s descendants. 24 years had gone by and Abram was 99 years old and Sarai was already 89 years old. At this late date Abram still did not have a child with Sarai, his wife. Ishmael, the child Abram had with Hagar, was already a teenager, but the child of promise who would fulfill and carry on the blessed covenant of salvation was not yet born.

This is when why we need to not how God revealed Himself to Abram on this occasion, declaring Himself to be “**Almighty God!**” Remember how in our opening liturgy we responsively declare, “**Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth .**” These words of the psalmist are incorporated into our liturgy to remind us of the fact that God can indeed do all things, indeed the most amazing things. In our liturgy we are assured by these words that God can forgive our sins. Even as we fail to understand that forgiving sinners is among the greatest of God’s works, so we also let these words pass our lips without realizing just how wondrous they are. He is **Almighty God!** By His command the worlds were brought into being. By His command life filled the earth. By His command we have life, both physical and spiritual, both temporal and eternal! God is able to do all that He has promised, including having an aged woman who had passed the time of life for having

children, give birth to a son, who would be the one through whom the gospel birthright would be passed down.

Abram was instructed by the Lord to walk before the Lord, that is to proceed in life believing the Word of the Lord. God assured Abram that he would be blameless, more accurately the Hebrew conveys that Abram would be “**complete.**” The child of God is made complete when he has faith and walks through this life according to the Word trusting the words and promises of God. This is what makes the covenant Abram had with God so personal. God spoke to him, and assured Abram of His presence and His blessing, and Abram received the Word of the Lord as it is, the Word of truth, and he lived according to that Word. Abram was the Lord’s, and the Lord was Abram’s God.

The covenant we have with God is no less personal. The words which He speaks to us are found in His inspired Word, the Holy Scriptures. The Lord knows each of us by name, and has called each of us to be His child and heir of everlasting life. He assures each of us that as we walk in His ways, according to His Word we shall be “complete” in Him, and we shall be blessed. The blessings that come to us according to faith are those which we read in the Gospel lesson this morning. We are brought into the Kingdom of God. We shall be comforted in all our distress and troubles for we know the grace and mercy of God in Christ. We shall inherit the earth, as God calls into being a new heavens and a new earth in which only righteousness dwells. We receive righteousness now according to God’s grace in Christ Jesus our Savior. This comes to us all from Almighty God, who is our Lord

and our God, even as He has declared us to be His very own.

II. A Covenant with Many Nations.

We take note of how Abram responded to this special revelation of God's grace toward him.

Genesis 17:3-6 Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: 4 "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. 5 No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. 6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.

Abram responded by humbling himself before the Lord. He fell on his face before Almighty God. God proceeded to make clear the extent of the covenant that was established first with Abram. He did this with a seemingly slight but ever so significant change in Abram's name. He would henceforth be called "Abraham". **Abram means "exalted father."** **Abraham means "father of nations."** Nations and kings would come from the line of Abraham. Indeed many countries would later trace their origins back to Abraham, not the least being the people of Israel. Kings would be among Abraham's descendants, great kings like David and Solomon, and yes the One who would be declared the **King of kings and Lord of lords**, whose kingdom would be an everlasting kingdom, and its boundaries extending to the very ends of the earth. Jesus, the Christ, is that king.

The sum total of Abraham's descendants, whose number was to be as the stars of heaven, would include also the spiritual children of Abraham. We, the believers of the 21st century are included in that number. The Apostle Paul declared in Romans 4:

Romans 4:13, 16-17 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.

16 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 17 (as it is written, "I have made you a father of many nations").

So this covenant was a covenant of God's grace which comes to all believers in Christ, no matter when they lived on this earth, no matter where they lived or what color their skin might be. As children of God we are the seed of Abraham, recipients of this grace and beneficiaries of this covenant which has gone forth to all the earth.

And yes this is --

III. An Everlasting Covenant.

Genesis 17:7-9 And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. 8 Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." 9 And God said to Abraham: "As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you

and your descendants after you throughout their generations.

God made it clear that this covenant He was confirmed with Abraham was not going to expire, not even with the end of Abraham's life. Much is made that these words justify a claim on a physical piece of land for the Jewish people. There is much to say about this misconception. For one must understand that those words of the Lord were bound together with a faithful relationship with God and a keeping of His words of promise. The covenant of salvation is central to the covenant. Many of the physical descendants of Abraham, enough to say the nation as a whole, rejected this covenant when they spurned the salvation that is found in Christ Jesus. By their unbelief the covenant terms regarding the physical land of Israel then also became null and void.

However, even Abraham understood that the greater blessing was not a temporary homeland here on earth, where his life was merely that of a pilgrim passing through. He knew that the Lord had greater things planned for him and his children after him, and this does very much include us! We read of the faith of Abraham and the other patriarchs in the epistle to the Hebrews.

Hebrews 11:13-16 "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14 For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. 15 And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not

ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.”

Abraham believed God. He held to God’s promises and those promises were all fulfilled, even when it seemed impossible according to human reason and experience. Abraham realized the wonder of a covenant with the Almighty God with whom all things are possible.

Hebrews 11:8-12 “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; 10 for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

11 “By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.”

This is also now our spiritual heritage which has come down to us as the spiritual descendants of Abraham. The covenant we have with God is as valid and certain as it was with Abraham. We have this added blessing, that so many of the promises of God have already been fulfilled in the King who came into the world, as both the Seed of Abraham and the Son of God. God is faithful. His Word is sure. His covenant is everlasting, and we too now know that we have a homeland, a promised land in heaven which shall be ours through Jesus Christ our

Lord. By staying in the Word, and by the blessed working of the Holy Spirit through that Word we may be assured that the blessed exhortation of the Lord shall be fulfilled in us and in our children: **“As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations”** (Genesis 17:9).

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.