

The Greatest Story (Part 2):

The Gracious God of Covenant & Faith

Genesis 12-22

Memory Verse: Ephesians 2:8-9

MANUSCRIPT

Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

Last week we began this journey from the fall to the final redemption of mankind. It is truly the Greatest Story of all time. It is God's Story and every bit of it points towards Christ. In **Genesis 3:15** we see the first mention the Gospel and the first promise of a savior. Jesus is the seed of woman that would one day defeat Satan and the curse for good.

In the story of creation we saw that God's main characteristic is his glory and his purpose is for that glory to be magnified throughout the entire universe. He created the world and humanity all for the purpose of celebrating his glory and making it known throughout the Earth.

Unfortunately, the story of the Fall shows us that mankind, left to themselves, will never seek God's glory above their own. But the fall was no accident that God did not foresee. Rather, it was part of his plan. Knowing that mankind would never worship him completely, based solely upon creation, he had already put a plan in place to save mankind from their sin through salvation. We see this clearly in our memory verse from this past week; **Ephesians 1:4-6; which says, "even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved."**

So... the only way we could truly worship God the way he deserves is if we were truly dependent upon his grace. And there is no greater display of his glory than through the grace he offers us in the death of his Son Jesus Christ. The ultimate will of God is the Glory of His Grace in the redemption of mankind through the death of his Son on the cross. He is the glorious God of creation and fall... and redemption.

And that leaves us with another question doesn't it. A question I'm sure many of you had after last week. If God had this plan to send Jesus to redeem us of our sins since before creation... then why didn't he send him immediately after the fall? Why thousands of years of a cursed humanity with no means of redemption? Why wait?

I believe there are two main reasons. 1) Mankind had to realize the depth of their depravity if they were ever to really depend on Christ for

their salvation. They had to know for sure that there was absolutely no way for them to save themselves. 2) Secondly, In order for God to receive the ultimate glory in this world from the people of this world, then he must include them in his story. And so we see God's plan further unfold. Yes, one day he would send the promised savior, but in his sovereign plan, he would use the lineage of a chosen people to do it. **It is the Grace of God which allows us to have a part in the greatest story.**

I have a friend in Michigan named Doug. Doug is one of the most gifted handy men I know. If it breaks in your home, Doug knows how to fix it. One day I asked Doug to come over and help me fix something in my house and I asked him... "how long do you think this will take?" He said, "it depends, are you helping or not?" I said, "well i'd love to help if I can." He laughed and said; "well if you help we can do it an about four hours... but if you don't help I can have it done in about 2." Sometimes it's easier without help. But God doesn't care about doing things easy... he cares about doing things for his glory. And so he would accomplish his master plan of redemption with the help of mankind.

But how could God trust fallen men to bring about his will? Doesn't the fall prove that we aren't good at partnering with God for his will? Again, in God's sovereignty he had a plan... covenant faith. His covenant promise to us is a grace without merit; undeserved favor. It is the only thing we can place our faith in and by placing our faith in his covenant promise... we are credited with righteousness.

Today we will see how this takes shape as we look at the story of a man named Abraham. Abraham was an ordinary man who God chose to be a part of his story. God would make a covenant with Abraham to bless him. Abraham in return would covenant with God through faith in his promises. Abraham's story shows us the special relationship between covenant and faith and how it allows us to take part in God's story of redemption. **It is By Grace Through Faith That We Find Ourselves In Covenant With God**

Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

So go ahead and turn with me to Genesis chapter 12 where Abraham's story begins. The first thing I want you to understand is this... **God's Covenant Shows Us That His Grace Is Completely Unmerited (Gen. 12:1-3.** Read with me in **Gen. 12:1-3** . Here we see the first covenant promise of God to Abraham, at that time called Abram. And here's what he promises. To bless him, to make out of his lineage a great nation, and to make the name of Abraham great in the process. All of this was for a purpose, that out of Abraham's blessing he would bless the entire world. Notice, Abram did nothing to earn this blessing. It doesn't say he was

chosen because of his righteousness or good works. The covenant promise to bless Abram is completely unmerited. Now turn over to **Gen. 13:14-17** and let's read. Here we see once again that God promises to give Abraham and his offspring the land, and to give him offspring that can't be counted. Once again, what is missing? There is no mention of Abram's righteousness or merit. Again, turn over to **Gen. 15:1-5**. "Once again God reassures his covenant promise to Abram. He tells him "I am your shield," and "your reward will be great." He expands upon the promise of blessing and tells him that he will have a son of his very own to be his heir. And still no mention of Abram having deserved this favor. One must wonder what did Abram have to do to earn it? Nothing is ever mentioned because as we see throughout scripture... God's blessings, his covenant love for us, is completely unmerited.

At this point I want us to take a step back and examine; what exactly did the idea of covenant mean in Abraham's time. The word covenant here is mentioned 231 times in scripture. It is such a vital concept that it is weaved throughout the entire Bible. It literally means a treaty; an alliance of friendship. The process of covenant was never mentioned without the verb "karat" which means to cut. In our language we would say, "to cut a covenant." There was no covenant without cutting and the cutting always meant bloodshed. You couldn't just cut a piece of parchment... there had to be blood. So if you recall David and Jonathan made a covenant with one another. They cut a covenant and literally cut their hands. You remember when as a kid you would spit in your hand and shake on it... well it was like that but with blood.

Another way to cut a covenant was with animal sacrifice. And that's exactly what we see as we continue reading in **Gen 15**. Look down at **verses 7-10**. Here the animals are cut in two and laid apart from their halves with a line down the middle. The animal sacrifice wasn't in order to gain the favor of those in covenant but rather as a reminder of the covenant. In the Old Testament the sacrifices were supposed to be a time of communion rather than a time of appeasement. After the animals were cut and separated both parties of the covenant would walk through the animals. Now look at what happens in **Gen. 15:17-18**. The fire, representing God, walks through the animals alone. Abraham never does. So get this... God makes the covenant alone representing his side and Abraham's side as well. Meaning... God's covenant is unconditional. It's a promise of his own accord. It is a unilateral promise that He alone pledges to fill, and he alone can fill. **Our God is a covenant making fire who fulfills his end of the bargain, and ours.** It is only by his grace that we can be in covenant with him. **It is By Grace Through Faith That We Find Ourselves In Covenant With God**

Now, if you noticed, we skipped a verse earlier. I want us to direct

our attention there now, because this is one of the greatest verses in the bible. Look at **Gen 15:6**. Do you see that? For the first time we see a mention of Abraham's righteousness... but it's not Abraham's righteousness... it's God's accredited to Abraham because of his faith. **Our Faith In His Covenant is a Saving Faith (Gen. 15:6).** Notice the Faith of Abraham. In **Gen 12:4** God called Abram... so Abram went. He said go to a land that you don't know but I will show you. Abram's faith in God was absolute; he was willing to go wherever God led him; even at the advanced age of 75. And of course we know of his faithfulness in **Gen 22:1-3** where God called him to go and sacrifice the promised son, Isaac. What's it say; "so Abraham rose and went." He continued to believe that Isaac was his heir – the covenant son, even though God asked him to sacrifice him. He knew that God would provide another sacrifice or another way.

Now look back at **Gen 15:6**. God saw Abraham's faith and credited to him as righteousness. Meaning that he credited his own righteousness in the account of Abraham. Abraham could not be righteous... remember the fall. But now, through the imputed righteousness of God, Abraham was considered by God righteous. Look at **Romans 4:18-22**. Paul argues this very point on our behalf. What is it that allows God to impute his righteousness in us? It is covenant faithfulness. Paul says this, that he was "fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised." And get this... when Abraham believed in God's promise to bless the whole world through his heir... Abraham was actually placing his faith in Jesus Christ. He was justified as righteous because of his faith in the promised heir of God. Abraham's faith was in Jesus Christ! The same way we are saved is the same way that Abraham was saved; through faith. It is faith that allows us to be in a covenant relationship with God.

But there is still one vital reminder. Even your faith is a gift of God's grace. Look at **Ro. 4:2-5**. Paul is saying that Abraham's faith, and our faith are both given to us by the grace of God so we cannot boast of anything; even our faith. And that is exactly what our memory verse for today says. Look at **Ephesians 2:8-9**. It is simple; God has gifted us with his righteousness, his justification, through our faith... and he has even gifted us our faith. **We cannot even boast in our faith, because our faith is a gift of God's grace .It is By Grace Through Faith That We Find Ourselves In Covenant With God**

The last thing we need to be aware of this morning is this. **Covenant Faith Shows Out (Gen. 17:1-11)**. Look over at **Gen 17:1**. God once again comes to Abraham to reassure him of the covenant promise he has made. But this time he says something different. He tells Abraham that if the Covenant is real in his heart that he will walk blameless and righteous before God. Because of Abraham's positional righteousness he show out practical righteousness. In essence; those who are in a covenant relationship with

God live a blameless and righteous life of worship. Those who have faith act out their faith. This is exactly what Paul says in **James 2:21-22**. Faith that is active. This idea is even built into the very root of the word “believe.” It’s made from two words which are “be” and “live.” Believe means to be living out what you say you believe. **Believe means to be-living.**

Now, look at **Gen 17:9-11** and see another element introduced here. Circumcision is a symbol of faith in the covenant of God. He has already cut the covenant and now he asks that we cut as well. Not in order to earn the covenant, but as a sign of our faithfulness. Paul speaks to this as well in **Ro 4:11**. Here he clearly states that circumcision is a seal of the righteousness of God. It is an act of obedience after the fact; much like baptism for us. More than anything God wanted us to be faithful, but sometimes faith is hard to see, so there had to be outward signs of that faithfulness; for the Jewish people that sign was circumcision. The point is simple – Abraham’s faith was real because he lived according to his faith. He showed his faith out. **Faith that isn’t seen isn’t real faith**. Lived out faith is what pleases God and brings us into a covenant relationship with him. **It is By Grace Through Faith That We Find Ourselves In Covenant With God**

Application (Resolution, You)

So the application is simple. Do you understand that it is only by the grace of God that you are chosen to be blessed by God? There is absolutely nothing you can do to be in covenant with God. He does it all. How have you seen God walk through the middle of the sacrifice for you? How have you seen him provide another sacrifice for you? Have you seen him cut in the flesh for you? Yes, of course you have. His son Jesus fulfills all the covenants of God. For Abraham and for us. And he offers his son freely without merit.

The question is... what is it that you have been trying to do in order to be in God's good graces? Is it religion, or simply just trying to be good, or is that you don't think you are “that” bad of a person. Have you tried to care for animals or the environment or served the homeless. What is it that you are doing to try to be in a covenant with God? Because if there is anything on your part you are missing the whole picture. We act out faith because of faith... not the other way around. And it is only through faith, rather than works, that one can truly please God. So... do you need to ask God to forgive you for your lack of faith in his unmerited grace?

Secondly, we have seen today that you, just as Abraham are saved simply by placing your faith in the covenant promises of God concerning his

Son. If you have placed your faith in Jesus as the only one through whom the whole world will be blessed, then you are saved. So, have you placed your faith in Jesus Christ? It is only by placing your faith in Jesus Christ that you are considered righteous before God.

And lastly, does your faith show? If not, it's not real faith! Go back and try again. You must live your life clearly so that everyone knows what you truly believe concerning the promises of God. Only then are brought into a covenant relationship with him by which we can partner with him to accomplish his plan. **It is By Grace Through Faith That We Find Ourselves In Covenant With God**

Conclusion

So, the altar call is this this morning. I'm hoping that everyone will participate. I want everyone to come spend some time at the altar today as we consider the covenant of God with us. There are **plastic knives** at four different stations across the altar this morning. I want you to come down here and grab a knife and either pray here at the altar or back in your seat. The knife represents the cutting of a covenant. It is to remind you of the covenant God has cut with you through his Son Jesus Christ. It is also to remind you to that your faith is to be lived out as a sign of your faith. So... Pray thanking God for cutting a covenant with you, thank him for unmerited grace. And also pray that you would be faithful to live out your faith –as a sign of the circumcision of the heart. Come place your faith in him today and be credited with the righteousness of God.