

The Second Sunday after Christmas

January 3, 2016

Prayer of the Day: Almighty God, you have filled us with the new light of the Word who became flesh and lived among us. Let the light of our faith shine in all that we do; through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day: Alleluia! All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God Alleluia! (Psalm 98:3)

Sermon Text: Hebrews 2:10-18

Our sermon reading comes from Genesis 17:1-7:

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. ² I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers."

³ Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, ⁴ "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. ⁵ No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. ⁶ I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. ⁷ 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.

Those words are pretty straightforward, are they not? You see God come to Abraham and then make a covenant (that is, a binding promise). He says words and ties them to visible signs in order to remove all doubt. Abram will have a large family, he will have kings in his genealogy; God will be with him and his family always.

Those promises sound good; they promise many great things to Abram. Yet, as you page through the chapters just before our reading, you wonder: Why is God repeating these promises again?

You heard that right. This is not the first time God spoke these promises to Abram. About 25 years before the events in our reading, God comes to Abram and lays out all the

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things he intends to do. God tells Abram to leave his homeland; he would receive an entirely new land. His wife will have their very first, long-awaited child. This child will give him grandchildren and great-grandchildren. In fact, whenever Abram looked up at the nighttime sky, the countless twinkling stars showed just how countless his descendants would be. As if that is not enough, the Savior first promised to Adam and Eve would take on flesh and step into the world through his family tree. Because Jesus is the Savior of the world, all the nations of the earth would be blessed because of Abram ([Genesis 12:1-3](#)).

You see God make all these promises—promises which still unseen. Yet, little by little, they begin to unfold. Shortly after God speaks to him, Abram packs up his household, says ‘good-bye’ to this father, and leaves his homeland. Although he does not know where he is going, he trusts that God will give him exactly what he promised.

Soon he settles into his new land ([Genesis 12:4](#); [13:12](#)). You can just see him sitting there, scanning over all the space which God says will belong to his family one day. He can visualize the tents, the animal herds, the commotion from so many people talking around him.

Yet, there is just one problem: Abram does not have a son. God’s promise of a child has been ticking for 14 years! That would not be too big of an issue if it were not for the fact that Abram is 85 years old and his wife is about 75 years old! Yes, 14 years earlier (when God first made his promise), there was a very slight chance that his wife could have a child at age 60, but now the chance for children is long past. His wife cannot have children—and Abram knew that.

So, he does what makes the most sense to him—he has a son. No, not with his wife, Sarah, but rather with her trusted maidservant. Her child would become a kind of stepson, someone who could inherit Abram’s entire estate and God’s promise of descendants and the Savior of the world ([Genesis 16:1-4](#)).

When you see all the promises God makes and you begin seeing them unfold, you kind of wonder. Why this? You see Abram take matters into his own hands. God made a promise to him. Was there something wrong with that promise?

As you look at this account deeper, maybe you see something that you struggle with too. God makes many promises to you. He promises to “remain with you always to the very end of the age” ([Matthew 28:20](#)). He promises to “send his angels so that you do not dash your foot against a stone” ([Psalm 91:9-11](#)). He promises to bring life as you know it to an end and bring you safely to heaven ([John 14:3](#)). Is it always easy to completely trust these promises—even when they appear so slow in happening?

Sometimes we look at the things God promises and may grow impatient with God. We do not think he is working fast enough. We do not think he doing a good enough job satisfying our needs or wants. So, we take matters into our own hands. We can think that prayer is unnecessary; decisions for life can be found in our own minds. We can search for comfort in our own willpower because God does not comfort us enough himself.

Yet, why? Is there something faulty with God’s guarantees? Are his promises less-than-trustworthy? Is there ever a time he has broken his promise? Or could it be that we do not think God is not able to do the things he says? Is it because we do not consider God reliable enough to keep his Word? Is it because we trust ourselves more than God?

That is really the heart of the issue, is it not? Abram did not trust that God would send him a full-blooded son. He determined that based on his own human understanding. So, he took matters into his own hands.

So, you can imagine why God would appear to Abraham again. **When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty..."** The name "God Almighty" is literally: "El Shaddai." That special name reminds you of what your God can do. "El Shaddai" describes God's omnipotence, that is, his absolute power over all things. God appears to a 99-year-old man and reminds him that a full-blooded son will come from him and his wife. By human standards a 99-year-old man and a 89-year-old woman will not have a child. Yet, El Shaddai is more powerful than human biology. What El Shaddai wants done, he will accomplish either within the laws of nature or outside those laws.

Then God gives a very visible proof that he would keep his promise to Abram—he changes his name. **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.** That additional "H" changed the meaning of his name. No longer does his name mean "exalted father" but rather "father of many." Yet, that additional letter served another purpose. Whenever Abraham heard his name called or spelled it out, his name could easily recall that God was going to greatly multiply his descendants.

You see that. When God determined the time was right, he put his promise into motion. At 100 years old, Abraham held his son Isaac in his arms. When Isaac grew older, he had a son named Jacob. Jacob had over 70 people in his immediate family. Those 70 multiplied and spread out ([Genesis 46:26](#); [Exodus 1:6-7](#)). God kept his promise.

Then Abraham's many descendents continued stretching throughout the centuries. Several nations could trace their ancestry to Abraham. Kings David and Solomon were part of Abraham's family tree. God kept his promise.

When the time had fully come, the King of the universe entered our world. Once again El Shaddai did what he wanted done. He worked outside of the laws of nature and gave his only Son to the virgin Mary. **CHRISTMAS IS GOD'S PROMISE KEPT.**

Yet, God made one final promise to Abraham: **"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."** This promise is one you still see kept today. Jesus is born to be your God. He is born to hold a complete trust in his Father's every promise. He goes to the cross to forever free you from the devil's accusations and to give you a new name: Christian. Every time your title "Christian" is spoken or you write it out, you remember that God is your God. You remember that **CHRISTMAS IS GOD'S PROMISE KEPT** to Abraham and to you.

That is what makes this Bible account of Abraham more than just a nice story; that is what keeps us from shrugging it off as something cute. You see the fear, the doubt Abraham goes through, maybe you see a little of yourself in him. I mean, what did God do for Abraham? He brought his son into the world.

Yet, he did more than that—God kept every promise he made. If he did that then, will he still keep his promises today? Does he intend on being with you always, even to the very end of the age? Does he really send out his angels to protect you? Does he really hear your prayers as you cry out to him day and night? Does he intend to bring you home to heaven? There is no “Yes...but...” “Yes, but... Abram’s life is different from our lives.” “Yes, but... Abram lived at a time where it was easier to trust in God than it is for us.” “Yes, but... Abram actually heard God speak; we do not.” Yes, your life might be different from Abram’s. You might face different challenges. You might live in a world where you are pressured to box up your Christian life. You might not hear the very voice of God. Yet, none of these things affect the promises of God, do they?

Just consider, what is it that makes Abraham such a “hero of faith?” Is it because it was easier to trust God’s Word in his time? No, what makes him a hero is on whom his trust is centered. God spoke; God gave visible reminders. Abraham heard; he saw; he considered God’s promise as good as done.

You and I imitate that confidence. Yes, it might not be easy to live in this world today. Yes, sometimes you do not see how God will heal you or how he will answer your concerns or how he will protect you. Yes, sometimes you will feel like life’s every decision is made in your minds. Yet, remember this: God kept his promises to Abraham and to you.

You trust the Word of the Almighty. Yes, the same El Shaddai that appeared to Abraham and reminded of his complete power over all things. Yes, the same El Shaddai, to whom you prayed the “Prayer of the Day.” The Word of God Almighty is as good as done. As a child of God remain confident that your prayers are heard, angels protect you, your daily needs are met, your heavenly home remains yours.

Why does God repeat these promises to Abraham again? To accomplish the same purpose he does in you. To remove your every fear and doubt. He repeats his promises so that you may trust in things not yet seen. He repeats his promises so that you can see where he kept them, where he brought them to fulfillment. **CHRISTMAS IS GOD’S PROMISE KEPT!** May you find continued comfort in your God.