

"Walk Blamelessly Before God"

Genesis 17

Last week we began in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3) where we saw that God enjoyed His relationship with Adam and Eve through the example of walking together. When we walk with people we enjoy our company, we joke around, we discuss ideas, family, jobs, life and we will learn things about each other that we didn't know before. A walk with someone strengthens a relationship.

God wants us to take that idea and apply it to our life with Him. Yes, He wants us to have consistent daily 'walks' with Him where we meet with Him and learn from His Word and talk to Him in prayer. But He wants our whole life to be an ongoing walk whereby we are always sensitive to His being with us, to strengthen us, to listen to Him, and to follow His leading.

Walking with God becomes synonymous with living for God. Enoch walked with God and Noah walked with God, describing their lifestyle. Noah was a righteous man meaning he was not only in a right relationship with God through faith but he was also living right for God surrounded by a godless society where every inclination of man's thoughts were evil all the time.

The next time we see the phrase 'walk with God' is from God's lips Himself in Gen. 17. Since Genesis 12, the narrative has surrounded a man named Abram. Abram was called by God to leave his home in Ur (modern-day Iraq) to the land of Canaan which God promised in Gen. 12 that He would give to Abram and his descendants. Problem: Abram (whose name means exalted father) is not a father. His wife Sarai is barren and she is 65 and Abram is 75 when God first called them. But Abraham believed God and His promises to be the father of nations, to receive a great land for his families and that somehow God would bless the whole world through one of his descendants (Gen. 12:2-3).

When we come to Gen. 17 we find out that Abram is now 99, still an exalted fatherless father. Sort of. 13 years prior to this when his wife Sarai suggested he impregnate their servant Hagar; Abram did have a son and named him Ishmael. When a pregnant Hagar infuriated Sarai, Sarai sent her away but God sent her back to Abram and Sarai and they raised him as their own. Since then, God has remained silent.

God's silence doesn't mean His promises have changed. So He physically appears to Abram - probably in human form since He will do this in Ch. 18 too - and reminds him of His promises back in Ch. 12. Nothing has changed. Abram and Sarai thought maybe God's plan needed help and so Abram is the father of Ishmael but Sarai was not the mother. So God comes to reaffirm His promises to Abram and commands Abram to walk blamelessly before Me.

As we'll see through other Scripture also,

God's Words and God's Plans Do Not Change **(Ch. 17:1-22)**

God has waited 13 years to remind Abram that He still plans to fulfill His promises for Abram and Sarai. Even at 86 Abram was able to be a father. So 13 years later at 99, God says it's still going to happen and Sarai, whose womb has been closed all her life, will be the mother. Nothing has

changed. How can God do this? He tells Abram and Sarai how, by revealing to them something new about Himself.

“I am God Almighty [El-Shaddai]”

God is able to do the impossible (vv.1a, 2)

I am God Almighty; ... ² I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.”

El Shaddai means God is all-powerful and all-sufficient. He is able to do anything and meet all your needs. Nothing limits God. This is a declaration from God that opening up the womb of Sarai is nothing to Him. The whole reason why God waits so long is to show that there is no human explanation for how Sarai and Abram could produce a child. And since this is how the promises start, then all the rest of it, descendants, land and the world, are not a problem for God. Regardless of whether we believe it or not.

Abraham laughs (I believe in doubt) in vv.17-18 and suggests Ishamel but God gently states, no, you and Sarai will have a son and you'll call him laughter (Isaac). I'll bless Ishmael too, but he's not the one through whom I'm giving the land, descendants or bless the world through. My words haven't changed nor my plans.' Because

He enables us to do what He says we can do (vv.4-8, 15-22)

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. ⁸ 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.”

When God says 'I will' then believe it, even if you can't see it right now or struggle to believe it now. Abraham would become the father of the Jewish nation and of many nations, God is blessing the world through one of His descendants, and He will still give Israel the whole land of Canaan one day. That's what God says so we need to believe it. If the other promises are literal so is this one. We can't pick and choose which ones we want to believe or which ones we would rather spiritualize. God will enable His people to do what He says will get done.

So God marks the occasion of this covenant reminder by changing their names. So Abram becomes 'Abraham', which means father of many/nations and Sarai which means 'My princess', changes to 'princess' or God's princess, again implying God is doing something more through her.

God has a sense of humour, doesn't He? Whenever Abraham would introduce himself, people might say 'Father of many?', how many do you have? Just one. How old are you? 99. Isn't a little late, buddy?

God reaffirms His covenant promises to Abraham but He also expects Abraham to respond to God's promise and power. What's his response?

Our Response:
Live Faithfully and Humbly in the Sight of God

"I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless.

'Walk' refers to his life. 'Before Me' means in front of my face, or in front of my eyes. God is Almighty. He's all-knowing and all-seeing. We are always before the face of God. He sees everything we do or don't do. He knows our thoughts and hears our words. We are always before the face of God. Nothing is hidden from His sight. So He expects us to live a 'before Him life'. To live with the knowledge that God is always with us. Knowledge of the Bible makes us responsible to respond to it. God is with us. He knows everything about us. Does that change the way we live? Not always. When we make up excuses not to serve God, or not to spend time with God or not to use our resources for God's purposes, we're not applying this knowledge of always being in the face of God. We live as if we don't believe 2 Cor. 5:10 which says

¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

Don't be self-deceived James says that just because you heard God's Word or read it or even memorized that you obeyed it. Walk/live with the knowledge that God is always with us wanting to walk with us wherever we go. And to be blameless. We're going to take a bunny trail here and explore what being blameless means, but first let's establish that this applies to you and me today. Because maybe you're thinking this only applied to Abraham. If God's Words and Plans Don't change

God's Expectations of Us Do Not Change

While God was making promises to Abraham's physical descendants, God also promised to bless the world through Abraham. You and I are spiritual descendants of Abraham through God's promise to bless the world through Abraham, which is through Jesus. Paul tells us Rom. 4:16-17

16 Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. 17 As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.

As Abraham's spiritual offspring through faith, the call by God to walk before Him and be blameless is a call for all who call themselves followers of Jesus. Not surprisingly, we see this expectation of blamelessness for all God's children.

What does it mean to be blameless?

To be blameless means

It's difficult for others to see defects in our lifestyle

The Hebrew word for 'blameless' is used in many contexts. One of the contexts is in the animals that were sacrificed. Just one example from the Passover instructions.

Ex. 12:3 Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. ... ⁵ The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. ⁶ Take care of them until the

fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight.

‘Without defect’ is the same word for blameless. It means you can’t see any obvious faults. We are called to live in such a way before God that people should not be able to see or hear obvious spiritual defects that would show we are not walking with God.

Another way the Hebrew word ‘Tammim’ is used is to describe the Word of God in Ps. 19

*Ps. 19:7 The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul.
The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple.*

God’s word is flawless. It is complete. It is whole. It meets the needs of our souls because they need to be revived, brought back to life. That’s how we’re saved and that’s how we grow. The Word is crucial to our becoming more blameless, complete in God every day.

A great illustration of a blameless character is in Dan. 6.

It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, ² with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss. ³ Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. ⁴ At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. ⁵ Finally these men said, “We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God.”

Being blameless on the outside had to come from an internal desire to humbly walk before God.

Our internal desires need to be God-centered (Ps. 15)

We can’t just say ‘I’ll do better’ today. We have to desire inwardly to change. To change the way we think. To live more consciously of life before God. To meditate and apply the truths of God’s Word. The psalmist asked in Psalm 15,

¹ Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill? ² He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart ³ and has no slander on his tongue, who does his neighbor no wrong and casts no slur on his fellowman, ⁴ who despises a vile man but honors those who fear the Lord, who keeps his oath even when it hurts, ⁵ who lends his money without usury and does not accept a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will never be shaken.

Notice how much interaction there is between attitudes and actions. Speaks truth from the heart. No slander on the tongue means they are not allowing those kinds of thoughts to dominate their mind. To honour those who fear the Lord means one has to think of ways to honour them beforehand. Lends without expecting interest means they have decided this beforehand. Those who live like this are not rattled by life’s difficulties. Because God is their center and they live a life before Him that pleases Him.

Now that we know what it means to live blamelessly and humbly before God, what should be our response?

Our Response:
Take Obedience with God Seriously
(Gen. 17:23-26)

When God said to Abraham,

"I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless.

Abraham hit the dirt. He grasped what 'God Almighty' meant. He believed that God said He was going to allow Sarah to produce a child at the age of 90 to Abraham (99). How do we know Abraham believed this? He took God's Word seriously. God commanded Abraham that as a sign that you believe God would do what He said in one year's time, circumcise every male in your household.

²³ On that very day Abraham took his son Ishmael and all those born in his household or bought with his money, every male in his household, and circumcised them, as God told him. ²⁴ Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised, ²⁵ and his son Ishmael was thirteen; ²⁶ Abraham and his son Ishmael were both circumcised on that same day. ²⁷ And every male in Abraham's household, including those born in his household or bought from a foreigner, was circumcised with him.

Can you imagine Abraham going up to all the men and telling them this is what God says to do because 99-year-old Abraham and 90-year-old Sarah are going to have a baby in a year? He took God's Word seriously and acted on it right away. And who is mentioned by name? Ishmael, the one Abraham thought would get the blessing but now he won't. I wonder how that chat went. They all agreed to do what Abraham said, which if he explained it properly, meant they too believed what God said, or at the very least, had such respect for Abraham's faith in God that they were willing to trust Abraham.

Walk [live], before Me [in My always with you presence, right in front of My face, God says] and be blameless, [live a holy life that people have a hard time seeing flaws in your character, internally driven by our desire to believe in and trust God to bless us in whatever way He chooses].

We're going to blow it. And when we do, we need to admit it, confess it and move forward again. God is waiting daily for us to spend time with Him, getting to know Him more through His Word about how loving, amazing and all-powerful He is. Don't miss those appointments. Think about what He's telling you through His words, be ready to obey them as you go on to live before Him.

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If you have any questions or comments about this message please contact us at olivet@rideau.net