

Walk Before Me and Be Blameless

Genesis 17:1-3a

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Introduction:

Today in our sermon series from Genesis, we come to chapter 17.

- Abram is now 99 years old.
- It has been 13 years now since Ishmael was born, and some time before that since God had formally cut a covenant with Abram as recorded in Genesis 15.
- As we have seen, that covenant is one sided, in which God promises to bring forth a kingdom of righteousness through Abram's descendants—even though Abram has not been able to have a son by his proper wife.
 - Because of God's slowness, Abram and Sarai had had a child by Sarai's maid, but this child was not to be the one through whom the kingdom would come.
 - Ishmael was a product of fleshly effort, which cannot bring forth righteousness—God must do that.

Now, after all these years of continued childlessness, the LORD comes to Abram to once again renew the covenant and to expand further on it.

- This chapter is an amazing literary masterpiece according to the Hebrew scholars...
 - It has a very complicated structure with overlapping patterns—
 - Even those who deny the unity of Genesis have to concede that this chapter is the work of one hand.
 - The covenant is brought to its highest expression here.
 - It is the centerpiece of the Abrahamic material.

Today, we are just barely going to get started with this chapter—mainly looking at the first verse.

- In this verse, we have revealed to us the goal of God's redemptive covenant for each individual within the covenant.
 - It is the goal of God's salvation for you if you are believer—it is the outcome that He has in mind for us when He saves us.
 - Our concentration will be primarily on the first verse—we will cover the first three verses...
 - And for our scripture reading, I will include the first 8 verses which I will summarise before we zero in on our main theme...

So please give me your attention now as I read to you from Genesis 17:1-8.

- I am reading this because it is the very word of God which He had given to His church.
- Please receive it with all the reverence and attention to which it is entitled.

Genesis 17:1-8: 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.”

May the LORD bless to us the reading of His holy word.

You see how this chapter opens with the LORD declaring that He is God Almighty and that Abram is to walk before Him and be blameless...

- That is what we are going to focus on—God’s goal for Abram and all who are saved is that they should walk before Him and be blameless.
 - But first let me show you a bit of an overview so you can see how this goal fits with the promises that God reiterates...
1. First, you see in verse 2 that the LORD declares to Abram that He will make His covenant with him.
 - The covenant had already been inaugurated by God in chapter 15 before Ishmael was born, but now it must be confirmed.
 - God is going to be even more specific and He is going to change Abram’s name to Abraham and give him the sign of circumcision...
 - so there is a lot of development here.
 - But what kind of person is it that God wants to have in His covenant with him?
 - It is one who walks with Him and is without blame.
 2. Secondly, you see that in verses 2-6, the LORD promises to multiply Abram...
 - He promises that kings and nations will come from him.
 - In other words, the kingdom that God is establishing through Abram is going to be a multinational kingdom.
 - But what kind of persons are these nations to be made up of?
 - Once again, they are to be made up of person who walk with God and are blameless...
 - God is not multiplying a man that is ungodly, but He is multiplying this man that He has called to walk before Him and be blameless.
 - God wants a multinational kingdom made up of holy people!
 3. Thirdly, the LORD says in verse 7 that He is going to establish His covenant with them to be God to them...
 - What does this mean?
 - It means that they will walk before Him as their God and that they will live a blameless life as His people.
 - They will be a people that others will look at and know that they know God.

- God is not the God of the wicked but of the righteous.
4. Fourthly, the LORD says in verse 8 that He will give them the land as their everlasting possession.
- Notice that He is giving it to Abram too, even though he is a stranger in it now—and again—it is an *everlasting* possession!
 - When we put this together, this implies that Abram will personally possess the land (not just that his descendants will)—after Abram is dead.
 - The clear implication is that God is going to raise Abram up again and give him the land.
 - And what will Abram be like when God gives it to him?
 - He will be holy—he will be blameless—he will walk in communion with God...
 - that is the kind of people that God wants to be His people...
 - that is the kind of people that God will have to be His people in His land...
 - that is what God, by His grace, will establish as His people.
 - It does not say that He wants people who are smart or rich or beautiful or successful, (though they may be that) but He wants godly people.
 - He wants people who walk before Him and are blameless.
 - This is what we want to look at today.

TRANS> So let's begin...

I. First of all, I want you to see how the God before whom we are to walk reveals Himself.

- You can see in verse 1 that He says to Abram, "I am Almighty God."
 - The name in the original is El Shaddai.
- A. It is a very remarkable and wonderful thing that God Almighty wants Abram to walk before Him!
1. Will God indeed have fellowship with man?
 - Will the immortal have communion with mortals?
 - How can this be?
 2. And all the more, how can it be seeing that Abram is a son Adam, a man fallen into sin?
 - God is a holy God and cannot look upon iniquity...
 - In fact, He is a consuming fire when He meets sinners—He consumes them in His wrath and indignation—
 - and He wants a sinful man to walk before Him and He wants to give him and everlasting possession where He Himself will dwell?
 - This is a very marvellous thing!
- B. But you see, that is why the name El Shaddai is used.
1. This name speaks of His divine power of God...

- It reminds Abram and all who come after him that establishing a kingdom of righteousness with sinful people in a sinful world is a work that only God can do.
 - Abram needed to see that God was the Almighty One because He needed to see that He could bring forth a kingdom of righteous people.
- 2. God—or should I say El Shaddai—has been going out of His way to make it clear to Abram that the promised kingdom is a work of divine power.
 - By withholding a child from him for so long, by having Sarai barren and now past the age to bear children,
 - God was establishing it right from the start that this kingdom would be supernatural in its origins!
 - There would be more supernatural births, including the virgin birth of Jesus Christ Himself.
 - It is not by might or by power, but by God’s Spirit that the kingdom will come forth!
- 3. What a great encouragement this is to us!
 - a. When we look at ourselves...and we wonder how we could ever walk before God and be blameless...
 - We are to remember that this is not a work of the flesh but of El Shaddai.
 - b. When we look at the task of evangelism...and we see how stubborn the nations are to come to Christ, and how weak they are even when they do,
 - We are to remember this too is the work of El Shaddai.
 - He will perfect His kingdom. He will bring forth heirs for His kingdom. He will cleanse them from their sin. He will not fail. He will prepare His bride for everlasting glory.
 - c. Let us consider how powerful God is and then we will have confidence that He is able bring forth the kingdom of His desires.
 - He is able to multiply people and make a whole multinational kingdom of people who walk, like Abram is here called to walk, before God and are blameless.
 - It should delight our whole being to know that El Shaddai is with us always to accomplish what He has promised, and He will not fail!
 - Take heart weak little faltering Christians!
 - God Almighty is with you!

II. Now let’s look more fully at what it is to walk before God and be blameless.

- Remember, this is the goal to which God is bringing us...in eternity, but stage by stage as He brings us along to the goal...
- A. Walking before God and being blameless are really inseparable. . .
 1. Walking before Him is more literally to walk before His face...

- It emphasises walking before the presence of God—as one who is consciously in His sight.
 - It is to walk and move openly before Him.
 - When we think about this, we can immediately see how dull we are—how insensible of our LORD who can see into our very heart...
 - You know how it is—when you are before another person—you are aware of it—it affects you, just knowing that they are there.
 - And yet, God, who is always present and who always knows the very thoughts of our hearts is one that we can put right out of our minds.
 - He is the most powerful and influential of all beings, and yet we dismiss Him from our minds.
 - How dull we are! How blind we are! How insensible!
 - The LORD wants that to change—and that is why He says, “Walk before Me and be blameless.”
2. And let me say that when you consciously walk with God, it transforms you so that you become blameless and whole...
- It puts a stop to ways that you are devoid of God in your life
 - Let’s look at five things it puts a stop to...
 - a. It puts a stop to a life without praise to God.
 - It is so wrong of us to have a God who is so majestic, so full of love and grace, so pure and spotless, so holy, so wise, so powerful...
 - to have a God like that and to ignore Him—to hardly ever praise Him—to hardly ever delight in His glory and excellence...
 - to be empty even when we come to worship Him.
 - We have the evidence of His divine power and goodness all around us, but as sinners we naturally do not like to retain Him in our knowledge...
 - We are like dead men walking around in the world, missing the very one who did it all and who has now also come in His Son.
 - But if we walk before Him, we notice Him, and when we notice Him, we praise Him—we see His glory and we praise Him for who He is.
 - The second thing it puts a stop to is similar to this...
 - b. It puts a stop to a life without thanksgiving to God.
 - How thankful we ought to be for His goodness to us...
 - For filling the earth with so many marvellous things for us to enjoy—beautiful things, tasty things, delightful things...
 - And most of all, how we ought to thank Him for His saving work in our LORD Jesus Christ...
 - That by Him we have forgiveness of sins...
 - It is just so wrong of us to go along all day as if this God who is constantly pouring out goodness on us is not present...

- We are to walk before Him, filled with gratitude.
- c. Third, walking before Him puts a stop to a life without dependence on God.
- Here we have the God who made the world, the God who has promised to work in us according to the same power that raised Jesus from the dead—the God who pours out His Spirit on us...
 - And we go about as if we have no help in Him—as if He is not near to us to call upon for all that we stand in need of.
 - We fret and we worry and we forget that He owns the cattle on a thousand hills.
 - We go into temptation without crying out to Him, as if He is not near to help us!
 - This is what we saw in Genesis 16 that Sarai and Abram had done—they had lost sight of Him as the God who sees and hears.
 - Walking before Him changes that.
- d. Fourthly, it puts a stop to a life without obedience to God.
- Walking before Him is to place ourselves under His exclusive supervision and guidance...looking to Him to direct us.
 - It is to consider constantly what might please Him, to endeavour to know His will so that we may honour Him.
 - I am not talking about in some mystical way, where you look for vibes to show you which coat to buy...
 - but I am talking about meditating on God’s law as you live your life—on your duty as it is revealed in His word...
 - even simple things like “love your neighbour as yourself.”
 - When you walk before God, you think about how to love your neighbour in each situation...
 - For example, when someone treats you unjustly, you think about how God wants you to respond...What does His word say?
 - He says to love your enemy and to do good to him.
 - He says to report one who commits a crime to bring about justice.
 - He says to show your brother his fault between you and him to try to restore him and to try to maintain peace with him.
 - If you walk with God, you think about such things in daily life.
 - It affects everything...
 - When an opportunity comes your way, you evaluate it based on God’s word.
 - When you are working, you do your work heartily before the Lord.
 - Each day, the question is not, “What do I want to do?” but rather, “What will please the LORD today?”

- You make decisions before God because you are walking before Him.
 - It makes it easy to decide on Saturday night if you are going to stay up playing a video game or surfing the net when you know that you won't feel like going to church in the morning...
 - But if you are not walking with God, I guess you probably won't be here.
- e. Fifthly, it puts a stop to a life without confession of sin to God.
- When you walk before His face, you see your sin—you are convicted of it—but you also see the remedy that God has for sin...
 - You do not hesitate to confess your sin—you must because you are living before His face—open and naked before Him who sees you.
 - So you don't try to hide your sin—He has a covering for it by the blood of the cross...
 - So you acknowledge it to Him so that He will cover it and set you out afresh to serve Him.
 - You keep, as the saying goes, short accounts with Him.

TRANS> So I hope all of that gives you an idea of what it is to walk before God and be blameless...

- It is to live before Him, praising Him, thanking Him, depending on Him, obeying Him, and confessing sin to Him...
 - Not that you are yet perfect—that is why you confess your sin...
 - But this is the goal that the LORD has...in fact...
- B. This is the very reason that the LORD saves us—that we might walk with Him and be blameless—that we might be reconciled to Him—that we might again have communion with Him!
- This is the whole purpose and goal of our salvation!
1. If you come to Him for salvation and you do not want to walk with Him, you are completely missing the point.
- It is true that we all stumble in many ways—we fail and come short—
 - but if you have come to Him for some kind of salvation that does not involve living in holiness before God,
 - then I have to inform you that you have not come to God's salvation!
 - You are still lost and you still need to repent and come to Jesus for salvation.
 - Perhaps you came for forgiveness (which is a wonderful part of it) but not for holiness—you are off track!
 - Or perhaps you came to be accepted—but with no intention of walking with God in a blameless way—again, you have missed it!
 - There are many who err in this way...

- They suppose that the grace of God means that God accepts you even though you don't repent...
 - That is wrong—it is not that our repentance is perfect, but it is that we come to God with a desire to be holy and we turn from our sins to walk with Him and to be blameless.
2. John Calvin puts it like this: We give ourselves fully to Him when we see who He is. But if we say, “Oh, God promised me that He will be my Saviour, so I am content,” while carousing, abusing every teaching, freely giving ourselves over to every vice; we would be tearing God's grace to shreds. So let us know that God adopts us on condition that, since He is our Father, we are also to be His children, that is, we are to give Him the obedience He is due.
- But our salvation does not depend on the uprightness of life that we have. It depends on God's free goodness.
 - Nevertheless, the very reason that God adopted us and pours out His grace is that we might learn to worship Him as our Creator and bear Him the honour that is His as our Father.
3. Too often we go through life just looking at the world—not walking before God—not getting up each day and going forth in our day for His pleasure!
- Calvin uses the phrase that we must collect ourselves to God.
 - We must place Him before our eyes in the midst of a crooked and perverse world and remember that it is to Him that we must give an account.
 - We are not here to please the world, but God Almighty!
 - You don't have to answer in the end to other people, but to God!
 - Collect yourselves to Him then!
 - Why would you want someone other than God to order your life? Why would you want to please someone else? Why?
 - What will you possibly gain by that?

TRANS> Hear His words to Abram and therefore to everyone else who comes into the kingdom of El Shaddai...

- “Walk before me and be blameless!”
- That is the ultimate goal!
 - Yes, I am far from it just as you are—but that is the goal.

III. This call of God, “walk before me and be blameless” is a call that echoes throughout the whole Bible—throughout all ages of redemptive history.

- Let me show you that this is so...
- A. Consider God's call to His people at Sinai when Moses reveals God's covenant to them.
1. The LORD shows them that they are unfit to have communion with Him—
- He appears on the mountain with thunder and lightning and a shaking earth...
 - And He warns them that they dare not touch the mountain or they will be pierced through because He is a holy God...

- They had to see this—they had to see the truth so they would know that He is holy.
 - You need to see that too!
2. But then what else does He do for them?
 - He provides a whole system for their cleansing...
 - He establishes priests to offer atonement, rituals for cleansing and purification, declarations of acceptance of them as His people...
 - By this provision, He shows them that though He is holy and they are unfit to come before Him,
 - He is the God of their salvation who cleanses them from their sins—it is His work through His appointed priests and sacrifices—He is the Lord who provides all that they need for forgiveness...
 - but not so they can live ungodly lives—just the opposite!
 3. As He reveals His acceptance of them through His provision, He also gives them His commandments and calls them to be holy as He is holy!
 - That is the standard—He wants His people to be holy and blameless before Him!
 - They are to be holy nation to show forth His praises and excellence.
 - They are to be His people who walk with Him...
 4. He puts His footstool in their midst—His tabernacle—to show that He does indeed dwell with them as their God.
 - He is in their midst, you see, and they are to live before His face—to, as we have been seeing, walk before His face!
 - They are to live not as though He is far off, but as though He is near.
 5. And He warns them that if they do not—if they disregard His commandments and His ordinances and cease to walk with Him...
 - He tells them that they cannot be His people—they cannot dwell with Him—that He will chasten them and if they persist in their rebellion,
 - That He will cast them out!
 - The land that He has given them will vomit them out!
 - God does not want a wicked and perverse nation—that is not why He saves us...
 - He wants a nation of individuals who walk before Him and are blameless...
 - That is what is revealed under Moses...
- B. And then there are the kingdom years—when God shows once again that He wants a kingdom of people that walk before Him and are blameless...
1. He reveals to them that He delights greatly in David because David is a man after His own heart...
 - He is a king who walks with Him and is blameless...

- And God promises to provide a king—a son of David—who will reign forever—who will be a true son of perfect righteousness—
 - far surpassing what David only points to!
2. As you read the Old Testament, you will see that the LORD judges the kings based on David...
 - With each one, He compares them with David—have they walked with Him as David did? Have them been blameless before Him like David was?
 - That is clearly what He is seeking, but there is much failure.
 - The northern kingdom is characterised by Jeroboam—the king who is noted as the one who causes Israel to sin by setting up idolatrous worship.
 - Walking before God and being holy—that is the clear goal!
 3. And what is the outcome of the kingdom years?
 - That God has to cast them out of His presence because they are not walking with Him as blameless...
 - He has no use for them as His people—and He is not even demanding perfection—He has given them sacrifices to deal with their sin—but they are not even seeking to walk with Him and to be holy.
 - He has chastened them and sent prophets to call them back, but they kill the prophets and persist in their rebellion...
 - The LORD does not want a kingdom like that.
 - So He exiles them and has the temple destroyed to show them how displeased He is that they are not walking with Him as blameless.
 - But He also gives them, at that very time, the best promises yet!
 - El Shaddai is going to change things!
 - He promises a new covenant in which He will pour out His Spirit to give them a new heart and a new life...a holy blameless life...
 - And He promises the complete forgiveness of sins...
 - And He continues to promise the Son of David who will establish His righteous eternal kingdom and give them an everlasting inheritance.
 - It is this kingdom He promised all along—
 - a kingdom of godly people who are holy and blameless, walking before the face of God.
- C. And then He sends Jesus—El Shaddai in the flesh!
- And again, we see that holiness is the goal for the people.
1. Before Jesus comes, John prepares the way for Him, and what does he do?
 - He preaches that the kingdom of righteousness is at hand and He calls the people to prepare for it by repentance...
 - He says, repent, for the kingdom is at hand...
 - And he provides the symbol of God’s cleansing—baptism.

- Look to God for the cleansing you need—for the repentance and the forgiveness of sin that only He can give you
 - It is a kingdom where people will be holy and will walk with God.
2. And then Jesus comes, and He is holy and blameless...He walks with God.
- And the Father expresses His delight in Him for that—that He is well pleased with Him...that He delights in Him...
 - Jesus is filled with the Holy Spirit and promises to give the Spirit to make His followers holy...
 - And Jesus takes on the role of priest and offers Himself as a sacrifice to bring true cleansing—again, to atone for their sins so that they can walk before God and be holy and blameless...
 - And God accepts his offering and proves that He has accepted it by raising Him from the dead and declaring Him to be LORD and Christ—
 - He is the founder of His kingdom of righteousness...of those who walk with God and are blameless.
3. And we are told repeatedly that it is God’s purpose in this kingdom that we be a people who are holy and who walk with Him...
- a. I already mentioned that John called for repentance—turning from sin—that we may enter His kingdom
 - God does not redeem us so that we can keep our sins, but so that we can be holy—we hear the echo of Genesis 17:1...
 - b. And Jesus likewise went about preaching repentance...we hear the echo of Genesis 17:1 when He says,
 - Matthew 5:48: **Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect...**
 - And Matthew 5:20: **For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.**
 - And He also told us to “deny ourselves, take up our cross daily, and follow Him...”
 - That is precisely what God told Abram to do when He said walk before Me and be blameless...
 - It is to walk before El Shaddai—to walk with Him and to live for Him in obedience, denying ourselves.
 - c. The apostles constantly call us, essentially, to this same walking with God in a blameless way...
 - 1) In Ephesians 1:4, we are told that God has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world—and why? “that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love!”
 - What a clear echo that is of Gen 17:1—walk before Me and be blameless...
 - God will have a holy kingdom!

- 2) In our reading from Colossians today, we saw a similar echo of Gen 17:1...
- What a rich and full statement there is of this goal in Col 1:9-14 where Paul says: **For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.**
 - And then there is that great passage about God including the Gentiles in this salvation to holiness...
 - **Col 1:21-22: And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—**
 - “Holy, blameless and above reproach!” What a clear echo that is of what God called Abram to be.
- 3) We could add so many other passages...but it is clear enough—God wants a kingdom of godly people—
- He wants a people who walk with Him and are blameless...
 - That is what He promises to Abram that He will establish.
4. And as El Shaddai, God is moving us in this direction—but you ain’t seen nothing yet! God will totally complete this work!
- Romans 8:29 says that God has predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son...to be just like Him!
 - And 1 John 3:2 tells us that when we see Him, we will be like Him...holy and without blame!
 - And Revelation 21 says that we will be the New Jerusalem that comes down from heaven to fill the earth...
 - The city of God, holy and perfected, to walk with God and be blameless.
 - Rev 21:1-3 says: **Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.”**
 - That is what God is doing!

- What a beautiful picture...Rev 22:3-5 echoes again—
 - **And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.**

Conclusion:

So what kind of people does God want in His kingdom?

- People who walk before Him and are blameless!
 - If this is not what you want, then you need to change—Hey! You are here for God—that is what His salvation is all about—to make you for God!
 - If you are not, then what are you for?
 - If not, how do you expect to stand in the judgement?
- God wants a world filled with godly people and He is going to have it.
 - He told Abram that He would multiply a people that would be holy and blameless—and give them an everlasting inheritance...
 - And He IS doing it!
- Right now, as El Shaddai, God Almighty, He is at work to establish this kingdom.
 - You are not yet there and neither am I, but there is hope!
 - It is the work that God is doing by His power and grace through Jesus Christ.
 - Come to Him and be saved!
 - Do as Abram did—fall on your face before Him!
 - Put yourself in His hands!
 - He has all that is needed to establish His righteous kingdom where we are holy and without blame before Him.