

The One Eternal Kingdom

Genesis 17:15-27

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Introduction:

For well over a year now I have been preaching to you through Genesis.

- Presently, we are looking at the part of Genesis that tells us about God's dealings with Abraham—a man who lived over 4000 years ago.
- We have been spending a lot of time looking at the covenant that God made with him which is introduced in chapter 12, formally established in chapter 15, and fully developed in chapter 17 where we are now.

But anyone not acquainted with the Scriptures might be curious as to why we would take so much interest in God's dealings with a man who lived 4000 years ago?

- What does this man who lived in tents and rode camels and had a barren wife have to do with us today?
- The answer is, much! Much in every way!

You don't have to be a great philosopher to see that the world is far from God.

- He is near in that He made it all and keeps it all going, but we do not know Him or thank Him or live for Him.
 - We have seen the reason for this in Genesis—
 - It is because our first parents—Adam and Eve—rejected God as their God by eating the forbidden fruit.
 - By that action, they spoke for the entire human race that was to come from them.
 - They joined the whole human family to the serpent, who is Satan and who led them into this rebellion against God.
 - And so we were all estranged from God.
 - And God turned us over to sin and to the curse—
 - That is why there is wickedness in all of us and why there is suffering and death in the world...
 - It is because we rejected God as our God.
 - But we have seen how God came with the promise of deliverance for those He called the seed of the woman...
 - Essentially, the seed of the woman was a kingdom of people that God would establish in the world that would turn against Satan and so return to God.
 - And He promised that among them there would be a Son who would overcome the serpent and all those who remained with the serpent in rebellion.

And we have been looking at how this promise was unfolded in God's dealings with Abraham!

- In short, God promises that Abraham will bring forth the seed of the woman—the kingdom that will have God as their God—a kingdom that will last forever.
 - God has been telling Abraham that this kingdom will come through his descendants even though Abraham's wife continues to be barren.

- Abraham, wanting to bring forth this great kingdom, had resorted to his own cleverness to make it happen and had taken his wife's maid...Hagar...
 - Perhaps he could bring forth the kingdom through Hagar since his wife was barren—and by Hagar the maid, he had brought forth a son named Ishmael.
 - But Ishmael was not to bring forth the eternal kingdom of righteousness.
 - The kingdom was to come through Sarah—Abraham's wife—
 - The kingdom that would come through her would be the only kingdom that has God as their God and that has eternal life!

That is what the passage we come to today speaks about.

- So let's read this passage and take a close look it.
- It begins in Genesis 17:15.

And remember, we read from this book, the Bible, because it is God's revelation to us—it is written by prophets and apostles who spoke God's word to us.

- God made sure that everything they wrote was just what He wanted.
 - So this is His very Word to us—listen to it with reverence!

Gens 17:15-27: Then God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah *shall be* her name. ¹⁶ And I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be *a mother of nations*; kings of peoples shall be from her.” ¹⁷ Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, “Shall *a child* be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear *a child*?” ¹⁸ And Abraham said to God, “Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!” ¹⁹ Then God said: “No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, *and* with his descendants after him. ²⁰ And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall

beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. ²¹ But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year.” ²² Then He finished talking with him, and God went up from Abraham. ²³ So Abraham took Ishmael his son, all who were born in his house and all who were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very same day, as God had said to him. ²⁴ Abraham *was* ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. ²⁵ And Ishmael his son *was* thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. ²⁶ That very same day Abraham was circumcised, and his son Ishmael; ²⁷ and all the men of his house, born in the house or bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.

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

In this portion, God shows us even more about the one eternal kingdom of salvation that He promises to bring into the world (and now by Jesus has brought into the world).

The first thing we see is that:

I. The eternal kingdom of God is brought forth by His divine power alone

A. God makes the amazing announcement to Abraham in verse 15 that his wife Sarai will bring forth the eternal kingdom that He has been promising to Abraham.

1. He announces this to Abraham by declaring that his wife's name is to be changed from Sarai and to Sarah, and connecting that change to a promise.

- Verse 15 and 16 read: **Then God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. And I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her."**

a. The name change from Sarai to Sarah is, according to some, rather insignificant in itself...both names are essentially the same...

- Both names mean "princess,"

- but some have suggested that Sarai means "my princess," so the change is from the name "my princess" which is limited, to the name "princess" which unqualified and unlimited.

b. Whatever the case, the significance is that God changes Sarai's name as a pledge that she is going to bring forth the son through whom the promised kingdom will come!

2. This is the kingdom that God had promised to Abraham all along.

- Remember again its features!

a. The Lord has told Abraham that it will be a very great kingdom!

- He has said that it will be kingdom composed of many nations!

- He has said that it will be kingdom with multitudes of people in it!

- He has said that it is a kingdom that will be greatly blessed.

- He has said that Abraham and his descendants will be given a part of the earth as an everlasting possession—that means that they will be resurrected to a new heaven and a new earth that will never end.

- In other words, they will have eternal life in heaven—

b. But the most significant promise of all is that everyone in this kingdom will have God as their God!

- That is what we saw was promised by God to Abraham in verse 7.

- Even though we all come from the human family that rejected God as our God right after we were created,

- this is the kingdom of people that God is restoring to Himself!

- We have seen that this means everything!

- If God is your God, He will completely forgive all your sins.

- If God is your God, you will be completely devoted to Him and you will be delivered from your sinful ways to serve Him.

- If God is your God, you will live forever and you will be blessed forever.

TRANS> And now God is promising that this marvellous kingdom will come from Abraham's wife Sarah!

B. Abraham is overcome with amazement.

1. He falls on face as he did earlier.

- Before it was because the LORD was speaking to him...
 - That is enough to make anyone fall on their face.
 - God is holy and everyone who has God speak to them is overwhelmed when he does...
 - His majesty and glory is overwhelming to us.
- But in this case the LORD was already speaking to Abraham and now he falls prostrate before the LORD because of what God has said about Sarai!

2. He laughs and expresses his astonishment.

- Verse 17 explains: **Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, “Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?”**

a. Sarah his wife had been barren since they were married, and now she has entered menopause...her monthly cycle has stopped...

- Now it is impossible for Abraham to conceive a child by her...
 - Yet the LORD has just said that she will bring forth the kingdom of God—that she will be the mother of this kingdom!

b. Abraham’s laughter is the laughter of unbelief...

- But not unbelief in the sense of supposing this to be impossible for God, but the unbelief of utter amazement...
 - As when someone wins the lottery and they say, “I can’t believe it! How could it be true?” even though they know it is true...
 - And they start laughing...
 - I think it is that kind of laughter...
 - I say this because of Romans 4:20-21 which says:
 - **Rom 4:20-21: He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.**
- And his questions—they are questions of amazement!
 - It is a way of expressing his amazement that God had just promised to do the impossible—something that could not be done apart from Him.

TRANS> And that is what you need to see here...

C. The Lord is making it clear that the bringing forth of this kingdom is His doing—

1. He is showing that this kingdom is not something that man can produce by his own works—not at all!

- It is something that God Himself must bring forth.
- He must do it all or it will not be done.
- It is completely impossible for any human to do this.

2. The whole reason that God had made Sarah barren in the first place was to show that the promised kingdom was not by human might or wisdom...
 - That it is wholly of divine origin.
 - That it is all by the grace of God and not by the works of man.
 - He will do more to show this to His people in the future as well...
 - For example, in the years to come, He will bring His kingdom people into slavery in Egypt and they will be completely unable to free themselves...
 - God will do that so that when He frees them, everybody will know that He did it—that He is the LORD who establishes His kingdom.
 - And in the days to come, He will declare that the Son of promise, the Messiah that He will give to His people, will be born of a virgin.
 - All this to show that He was a Son given by God from heaven, yet a Son that was brought forth of human flesh.
 - And the other nations that come to Christ...
 - God put them in bondage to idols until the appointed time when Christ came—and then God gave them life...
 - He put a new heart with in them and they were born again and they believed the gospel and they entered this kingdom!
 - They were told that they were dead in their sins, but that God was the one who made them alive.
3. All this is done to show anyone who sees this kingdom that it is not a kingdom brought forth by the works of man.
 - It is a kingdom brought forth by the grace and power of God alone!
 - The world lay dead in its sins, cut off from God, but God by His own arm brought salvation into the world!
 - He raised up a kingdom of people who were brought back to Him as their God!
 - It is His doing and it is marvellous in our eyes!
 - Praise be to His name forever and ever! Amen!

TRANS> And I want you to see from our text that...

II. No other kingdom is like this kingdom. There are no substitutes for it!

A. Abraham pleads for Ishmael to live before God.

1. In hearing that the promised kingdom will come through Sarah, Abraham is concerned for Ishmael.
 - a. If you remember, Ishmael was the son Abraham had when Sarah gave him her maid.
 - It was a custom in those days for barren women who had maids to give their maids to their husbands to have children for them.
 - It was a sinful custom, but it was one that Abraham and Sarah resorted to when they saw that Sarah was barren...
 - They thought they had to help God along in this way.

- b. And now Abraham is rightly concerned for Ishmael.
 - If the kingdom is brought forth through a son born to Sarah, where will this leave Ishmael?
 - Ishmael is to become a kingdom too, but will his kingdom be blessed to live before God? Will they also have God as their God?
 - You see that Abraham's prayer gets right to the heart of the matter:
 - In verse 18, he says: **"Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!"**
2. Abraham wants Ismael to have eternal life too and to have God as his God.
 - a. God had promised that He would make His covenant with Abraham and with all his seed to be a God to him and to his seed.
 - So it is right for Abraham to pray for his son.
 - He wants Ishmael to have eternal life too.
 - b. Perhaps Ishmael would also bring forth an eternal kingdom of righteousness.
 - Perhaps there would be two kingdoms???
 - Perhaps there would be two ways of salvation???
 3. This is the longing that many well-meaning people have had.
 - Perhaps the different religions in the world represent different ways of coming to God...
 - Perhaps in the end, we all get to the same place.
 - Perhaps the kingdom that God promised to Abraham and that came by Jesus Christ is just one of many paths to God.

TRANS> But this is not so—salvation is a very precious thing.

- God only has one Son to send to the cross, and He only intends to send Him once—He is the only Saviour for the entire world.
- B. The LORD makes it clear...there is no other kingdom of God but the one that comes through Isaac.
- He says to Abraham in verse 19: **"No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him. ²⁰ And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. ²¹ But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year."**
1. You see how God promises that Ishmael will bring forth a great kingdom with 12 princes...
 - He will be fruitful in terms of multiplying in the earth—and he will be a great nation in a worldly sense...
 2. But the LORD makes it clear that only in the son born to Sarah will there be an eternal kingdom in covenant with God as their God.
 - He commands that Sarah's son be named Isaac, which means laughter...
 - reminding everyone that he is the son born under impossible circumstances...
 - that he is the son whose birth amazes everyone because he is brought forth by divine power instead of human power.

- God specifies that Isaac will be born in one year, and He repeats that it will be with Isaac that He will establish His everlasting covenant.
 - It will not be with Ishmael.
 - You see how He emphasises that it is an everlasting covenant?
 - There is only one kingdom that has a covenant in which God promises to be the God of the people.

TRANS> This makes it clear that God only has one kingdom.

- There are not different ways to come to God—there is only one way.

C. Ishmael (and everyone else) can only be blessed through the eternal kingdom that comes through Isaac.

1. Why is that so? It is so because this is the kingdom that will bring forth Jesus Christ the Messiah. He is entirely unique!
 - a. Acts 4:12 says of Him: **Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.**
 - There are many different religions and there are great promises that are made...
 - Some of them might even help people to treat each other better in the world.
 - But none of them have a Saviour that can restore the members of the human race to God and provide atonement for their sins.
 - None of them are kingdoms that will last forever.
 - b. Jesus alone is the Saviour of the world—
 - He is the very Son of God—
 - He is the One who went to the cross to ransom sinners—no one else could make an offering like He made—
 - He offered Himself—and He alone is the Son of God.
 - And He offered Himself because that was only acceptable offering to bring forgiveness to those who rejected God as their God.
 - No one else can do this so He is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world.
 - Everyone who wishes to be saved must come to Him and they must enter into His kingdom.
 - He is also the One who gives His people the Holy Spirit who works in them to turn them back to God,
 - The Holy Spirit gives them a change of heart so that they want to dedicate themselves to God and so that they want to be holy...
 - And Holy Spirit is the One who, at the end of their days on earth, perfects them in holiness—makes them sinless.
 - Jesus the Son of God is only one who is accepted of God, and He alone is able to make those who enter His kingdom acceptable.

2. Ishmael will have a great kingdom in the earth—but eternal life, reconciliation with God, forgiveness of sins, will not be in this kingdom.
 - Like everyone else, Ishmael and those of his kingdom must humble themselves and enter into the kingdom that will come through Isaac if they wish to be saved.
 - For Ishmael to have God as his God at this time,
 - he would have had to acknowledge God’s choice of Isaac and look for salvation through Isaac’s seed.
 - It was through Isaac’s seed that God would speak His oracles, and through Isaac’s seed that God would bring forth Christ.
 - Salvation is of the Jews, and all other peoples must put away their pride and receive the oracles of God from the Jews.
 - They gave us the Old Testament and they gave us the New Testament—God’s oracles—and they gave us the Messiah.
 - We must be grafted in to them as wild branches grafted into a root.
 - We must enter the kingdom of the Messiah, trusting in Him as the only one who is able to bring anyone to God.
 - He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
 - No one can come to the Father but through Him.
 - Yet, anyone who does come to Him, He will not cast out!
 - If you want some other way of salvation, a way from your own people and their prophets, you will not find it.
 - You must come to the kingdom that came through Isaac, the son of Sarah and Abraham.

III. See that you enter the eternal kingdom of righteousness

- A. See the example of Abraham; how he immediately receives the covenant sign.
 1. He does not put it off.
 - a. He is already trusting God to be his God and to give him eternal life.
 - And now God has given this sign to mark out those with whom He has established His covenant to be their God.
 - He wants to be identified with this kingdom by the sign that God has now appointed.
 - b. Though he was old and circumcision was inconvenient, he does not put it off—for God has appointed it.
 - He might have used the excuse that he was too old to be circumcised—that it was undignified—
 - He might have thought that it would be good to wait to get used to the idea and to sort of prepare himself for it.
 - But waiting would only make it harder and harder.
 - This ninety-nine year old man gets circumcised the very day that he learns that this is what God wants.

2. And look, he also immediately has his whole household circumcised as commanded.
 - a. Verse 23 tells us that he had Ishmael circumcised that very day and verse 25 tells us that Ishmael was thirteen years old.
 - Even though the promise was to come through Isaac, it was still God's will for Ishmael to receive the sign of the covenant.
 - It was a great mercy to Ishmael!
 - God was showing him he was identified, as Abraham's son, with the kingdom that would come through Isaac who was yet to be born.
 - In this way, God did indeed offer eternal life to Ishmael!
 - Ishmael was not the one through whom the kingdom was to come, but he could be blessed by association with Isaac.
 - All he had to do was continue in Abraham's house, which would be led by Isaac...
 - That is where the oracles of God would be heard and that was where the blessing of the salvation would come.
 - That is the people where God would be their God.
 - Sadly, Ishmael did not continue in God's kingdom...
 - In pride, he rejected Isaac and so rejected Christ who was to come through Isaac, and so separated himself from God as his God.
 - But though Ishmael did this, there is yet a blessing in that some of his descendants have come to God in our day.
 - But to do this,
 - they must come and believe the word of God that came through the Jews,
 - and they must receive the Messiah that came through the Jews and enter His kingdom.
 - Many of the Jews themselves were like Ishmael when the Messiah came...
 - Though they were circumcised, they did not accept Him as their Saviour but wanted to be saved by their own works.
 - That is why Jesus said that many of them would be excluded from His kingdom—cut off from God,
 - and that many Gentiles would come from the east and the west and sit down with Abraham in the kingdom.
 - The Apostle Paul tells us in Galatians 3:29 that **“And if you *are* Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.”**
 - Now that Jesus has come, this true not only of Gentiles, but also of Jews—all must come to Christ.
- Ishmael, and later Esau, who were circumcised and the rejected the kingdom because of envy are the forerunners of circumcised Jews who rejected Jesus.

- b. And look, Abraham also has his servants circumcised.
 - Having God as your God was not only the privilege of Abraham, the master of the house...
 - It was the privilege of all of his servants who were either born in his house or bought with his money.
 - They had the privilege of being in the house of a man that was given God's oracles and promised God's salvation...
 - That salvation was for them just as much as it was for Abraham and his sons.
 - All they had to do was trust in God's promises and they would have God as their God.

TRANS> With what gladness Abraham received the sign of belonging to God that was appointed in his day.

- What a great example he is to us!
 - And now I say to all of you:

B. With what gladness you ought to receive God's covenant with its signs!

1. We have seen in previous sermons that the sign of the covenant was changed from circumcision to baptism.
 - a. This change was made when Jesus Christ, the Son of righteousness finally came.
 - Before His coming, circumcision reminded the men (as well as the women) that they could not bring forth a righteous son...much less a righteous kingdom
 - It was something that only God could do by His divine power.
 - And not only that, but circumcision reminded the people that blood must be shed for sin—a sacrifice must be offered...
 - And it also represented the cutting away of wickedness from us.
 - Jesus Himself fulfilled it by Himself being cut off for us.
 - He became our sin—He took all the shame of it and bore all the guilt of it before God the Father—even though He had no sin.
 - And so He was cut off—circumcised from the body of the church that the whole church might be saved.
 - He came to save us and to be cast away as unclean on the cross...
 - And because He made satisfaction for the whole kingdom, because God accepted His sacrifice for us—He was raised up with the promise of forgiveness for all.
 - The sign of circumcision was fulfilled by Him, and then the sign was changed to baptism.

- b. Baptism shows that we are cleansed by His saving work.
 - 1) Our guilt is washed away by His blood, shed on the cross
 - We do not need sacrifices to be offered because now the only sacrifice that can take away our sins has been offered...
 - We are not still waiting for this to be done because He has come and He has done it!
 - So instead of men coming to be circumcised, now both men and women are called to be baptised...
 - Baptism is a sign to show that they are cleansed by the blood sacrifice of Jesus for all their sins!
 - 2) And our corruption is washed away by the Holy Spirit.
 - Jesus was cut away for us, and now when we come to God, our sins are cut away by the Holy Spirit...
 - By coming to Christ, we are washed with the washing of regeneration so that we delight in the law of God...
 - We come to Him to serve Him as our God.

TRANS> It is those two things—washing from guilt by Jesus and washing from corruption by Jesus—that are represented by baptism.

- 2. Baptism, like circumcision is a pledge of God's love to us, and a pledge of what He does when we come to Him.
 - And so it ought to be welcomed by us...just as circumcision was by Abraham!
 - We ought to be delighted to be united to receive this sign—and delighted if we are among those who have received it!
 - It means that we belong to God and He to us!
 - It means that we have forgiveness and new life in Jesus Christ!
 - It means that God is our God, and we ought to cherish this sign.
- 3. By baptism, you put yourself and your household into God's hands for the salvation that He has promised!
 - a. It is the external symbol that God has appointed for you and for your household to come to Christ...
 - By it, you say, Lord, I am not looking to some other kingdom for my life—
 - I have come to the kingdom you established in Jesus for life...
 - For forgiveness and for the power to live for you.
 - Baptism is the outward form of identification...but...
 - b. Baptism must have the inward reality of personal faith to save you.
 - 1) If you are like Ishmael, you have the sign, but not the Saviour.
 - You have not given up on yourself even though you have the mark that identifies you with His saving work.
 - You are refusing to die to self and rely on Him.
 - You are refusing to come God as your God through Jesus.

- 2) The sign, without inward faith in God's promises, will only serve to condemn you all the more.
 - Think of it—you have the mark of salvation, but you are not trusting God for that salvation!
 - Like Ishmael, and like the Jews who rejected Jesus, though you are outwardly in the covenant, you will perish.

- c. Let me urge all of you then to put yourself in God's hands for salvation.
 - If you have not been baptised, then enter in His kingdom by baptism received with trust in His promises.
 - If you have been baptised, then be sure that you are trusting in the cleansing that God promises in His covenant...
 - resting in Jesus' shed blood for forgiveness of your sin...
 - and looking to His Spirit for a new life of obedience and service to God.

Conclusion: There is only one kingdom of righteous where this can be found!

- It is the kingdom that God brought forth through Abraham and Sarah—
 - Through Isaac and ultimately through Jesus Christ.
 - In this kingdom you are reconciled to God and given life forever.
 - No other kingdom can give you that.

- In Mark 8:34-38, we are told of Jesus that: **When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. ³⁵ For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. ³⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? ³⁷ Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? ³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”**