

The Loving Kindness of God

The Covenant of Abraham

Sermon 30

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The word for covenant in Hebrew is *hesed* and it means compassion, loving kindness and tender mercy.

Contrary to popular belief, mercy isn't the absence of receiving, as a sinner, what you deserve any more than grace is unmerited favor. In fact, "tender mercies" in Hebrew is *racham* and is a metaphoric description of the mother's womb. It portrays a beautiful picture of protection and safety within the ultimate love environment. The Hebrew for grace is very similar. The attitude of not getting what you deserve is rooted in the distorted concept of penal substitutionary atonement. It is based on a false idea concerning who God is and who we are. It has absolutely nothing in common with covenant mercy.

In Malcolm's book, *The Power of the Blood Covenant*, he gives us a working definition of the word as follows:

A covenant is a binding, unbreakable, obligation between two parties based on unconditional love sealed by blood and sacred oath, that creates a relationship in which each party is bound by specific undertakings on each other's behalf. The parties to the covenant place themselves under penalty of divine retribution should they later attempt to avoid these undertakings. It is a relationship that can only be broken by death.

This is in itself the basis for the atonement theory we subscribe to called Representative or Recapitulation Atonement. The architect was Irenaeus, a very early Church Father in the 2nd century AD. He lived just after the age of the apostles as he was a disciple of Polycarp who was a disciple of the Apostle John. It was based on

Eph 1:

9 "He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He set forth in Him,

10 regarding His plan of the fullness of the times, to bring all things together in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth."

We are those things brought together in oneness and peace both with God and within ourselves in love. It means we died with Christ, were buried with Christ and were raised along with all creation anew in Christ.

When a group of people prepared to enter into covenant with another party, they selected a man from among themselves as a representative who would speak as and for them. He had to be of the same blood and family as those he represented. He is also the guarantor of the covenant, the one in whom the covenant is made. He is the guarantee that terms and promises will be kept. If not, his life is forfeit.

Think about these things as we explore this Covenant with Abraham, which I describe as the Covenant of God's Loving Kindness. The representative is not Abraham. He represents mankind, carrying the seed, yet dead in sin and portrayed in a death stupor. The actual covenant representative is Christ who walks through the sacrificial pieces in His dual nature of both God and man. As we discuss this keep in mind the exquisite beauty and love of God in His role as Savior for it prophesies the Gospel message of the Cross, "The lamb slain before the foundation of the world." Jesus' death wasn't the result of broken covenant for He kept it fully as both God and man. It was about broken man. It was to willingly enter the realm of men's death in order to release us from it. His very presence within death destroyed it.

The covenant was the reassurance to man that God doesn't do abandonment. His absolute intention to reconcile man back to Himself was on full display in the Trinity. Paul is absolutely clear about this.

2 Cor 5:

19 "...that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation."

Let's examine the making of this covenant.

Gen 15:

1 "After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be exceedingly great."

This is the beginning to the great Abrahamic Covenant. The name Abram means high or lofty father. God renamed him “Abra ham” just prior to the birth of his son Isaac. It means high and lofty father of the many and is an allusion to God the Father and His family. This covenant between God and man with its reward is described as being exceedingly great. Exceedingly and great when used together communicate an intensive superlative. It describes that which is ultimate. There is no greater reward. The root of the word shield means to hedge about, to protect or to defend. We read it in

Psalm 91:

1 He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, who abides in the shadow of the Almighty,

4 He will cover you with His pinions, and under His wings you will find refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

It comes from the Hebrew word for Passover, *pasach*, meaning protection. Its expanded meaning is a thorn and from there a shield. Thorn bushes were used by shepherds to build a wall to enclose their flock during the night to protect them from predators. He would leave an opening in the wall for the sheep to go in and out during the daytime. At night he would act as the gate by lying across it in the darkness. He was both keeper and defender. It also carries with it the meaning behind Jesus’ crown of thorns on the cross for it symbolized the wall of protection around the mind of Christ. Have you noticed that even though the majority of His body was totally ravaged, His mind continued to function with the ability to think and speak. I believe the reason is found in

Colossians 1:

21 “And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled”

It was Jesus’ intention to exchange and renew our minds in His; to destroy the fallen and poisoned mindset of Adam and replace it with His own. For everything first takes place in the mind. This is the mortal being restored to immortality and the corruptible achieving incorruption.

Abram, recalling God’s earlier promise of being made a great nation, questioned the reward in mind. For how could he have so many descendants. He didn’t even have an heir for apparently Sarai (Saw rah ee) was barren. But God reassured him in an astonishing fashion. He had him look at the night sky and imagine the number of stars as He said with breathtaking candor, “So shall your descendants be.”

It must have been in absolute amazement that we read in

15:6 "...he believed the LORD; and God reckoned it to him as righteousness."

Paul repeats this statement in

Romans 4:

3 "For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS COUNTED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."

The word translated in both Hebrew and Greek as counted or accounted is to reason, impute, reckon or number something as true. It was used often in relation to mathematics as in to compute an equation. Today the church has redefined and retranslated impute. It's no longer something that says $2 + 2 = 4$ but is understood as an implied reward of righteousness. It doesn't apply today but will only be experienced when we die. In other words, it isn't real now. We have to wait till we get to heaven to obtain it. Imputation has been distorted from the word *accounted*, that means absolutely real and true, to something that's not, a classic example of bad theology supported with bad translation. Its definition in Hebrew negates this idea because it also means to plait or weave together. Ancient Hebrew spoke only in past and present tenses. Therefore, it was something taking place in the "now". This is the picture of organic union being our reality.

To believe is the assent on our behalf to enter into this righteous relationship of covenant oneness. Marriage, after all, is covenant and our marriages are not simply an imputed relationship!

In both Hebrew and Greek, *believe* means to trust or to have faith in. In Hebrew, however, it carries the additional element of giving or extending the right hand. The right hand in scripture always exemplified power or authority. The act of entering into covenant was always referred to as "cutting covenant". It was accomplished by literally cutting the flesh, most often in the hand or wrist and grasping the other participant's hand allowing the blood to flow and mingle as one. The word imputed, as currently defined, carries no such meaning and therefore doesn't cut it. Haha!

Gen 15:

7 "Then He said to him, "I [am] the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it."

The promise of the land to Abram was to provide the womb for the seed promised in

Gen 3:

15 “And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.”

It spoke of the coming Savior we read about in

Gal 3:

16 “Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ.”

None of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac nor Jacob believed that the purpose of the land spoke of anything other than the inheritance in the Kingdom of the coming Messiah.

Hebrews 11:

8 “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go.

9 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.

10 For he looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”

The word city in scripture refers to a society of people. What city were they looking for?

Rev 21:

2 “And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband;”

It is the home of the Bride and Bridegroom. It’s where we live. Contrary to what many of our brethren believe today, the significance of the land was simply the place where the Messiah, the True Israel, would be born into this world. It protected the line of succession to that birth. Once this is accomplished and Jerusalem and the Temple are subsequently destroyed, we hear no more

about the land as a literal entity. I believe that in a metaphorical sense where land, soil, ground, etc. are used to describe the heart and mind of man, it is the conveyance of His mind in restoration and wholeness to His body, the Church. Again, in opposition to popular dispensational teaching, the church and Israel aren't separate entities with different plans of salvation. There is one plan and that is Christ. For the one came out of the other. If Christ was True Israel as well as the Resurrected Body of the Church, then they don't exist concurrently but consecutively. He's not both simultaneously.

Isa 46:

3 "Hear Me, O house of Jacob, And all the remnant of the house of Israel, You who have been burdening Me from birth And have been carried from the womb; 4 Even to your old age I will be the same, And even to your graying years I will bear you! I have done it, and I will carry you; And I will bear you, and I will rescue you."

Rom 11:

5 "So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.

6 But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise, grace would no longer be grace."

Only the remnant of Israel, those who no longer sought salvation in the law but believed in Christ Jesus, participate in His body, the Church. All people are made one in Him, the blueprint of the new man. We are still very much human but are also partakers or sharers in common with Him in divine nature. For in Christ there is no longer Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female. Obviously most don't see this, however, in God's astonishing promise of heirship to Abraham the design crystallizes. The stars of the sky signify the heaven-born church and the sands of the sea the earthly seed of Abraham. For Paul writes in

1 Cor 15:

49 "And as we once bore the image of the man of dust (or the earthy man) let us now image the Heavenly Man."

Abram asked God what was the proof that he would inherit what God had promised.

12 "Now it happened that when the sun was going down, a deep trancelike sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him."

Why did Abram fall asleep and why was he terrified at what he saw? It's because he stared death and bondage in the face. What is it about death that holds such terror? After all, Jesus described the dead as simply being asleep.

John 11:

11 "He said these things, and after that He *said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him."

And in the account of Jairus's daughter,

Mark 5:

39 "And entering in, He *said to them, "Why are you making a commotion and crying? The child has not died, but is asleep." 41 And taking the child by the hand, He *said to her, "Talitha Kumi!" (which translated means, "Little girl, or Little Lamb, I say to you, arise!"). 42 And immediately the little girl stood up and began to walk, for she was twelve years old. And they were completely astounded."

This is an interesting perspective as seen through the eyes of God for Jesus tells us in the story on the road to Emmaus:

Luke 24:

25 "And He said to them, "O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!

26 "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things (crucifixion and death) and to enter into His glory (resurrection)?"

27 "Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He interpreted to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures."

And of course we read in the book of Hebrews that the Old Testament is types and shadows of the New. He made the covenant with Abraham for before Abraham, I AM. Therefore, in the mind of Christ, is death real? Or is death and the fear of it a belief so deeply entrenched in our psyche that we've made it real? We know that fear of punishment isn't real because John tells us so.

1 John:

4 “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love.”

Death, fear and punishment are all part and parcel. The punishment referred to is Adam’s misunderstanding of God’s promise of death in eating forbidden fruit. They were so certain that God was going to kill them for their insubordination that they couldn’t put distance between themselves and Him fast enough. Ironically it was the separation in broken relationship that brought about their death. The sad thing is many in the church today believe the same thing and are experiencing the same results because they know neither the God who is Love nor themselves.

Paul gives us an interesting insight on death in

Philippians 1:

21 “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

22 But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know what I will choose.”

He has reached an understanding in the oracles of Christ as well as a point in his life experience whereby he knows that he has a choice that will be honored by God. For Jesus said at the last supper

John 16:

24 “Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made complete.”

Why would Paul be so confident in this? Because he knew the truth and was set free.

Hebrews 2:

14 “Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,

15 and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.”

Gen 15:

13 Then He said to Abram: “Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land [that is] not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years.

14 “And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions.

15 “Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age.

16 “But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites [is] not yet complete.”

God describes to Abram that his descendants will be taken captive in an alien land, namely Egypt, and will be in bondage as slaves for over 400 years. He, however, will die in peace at a ripe old age prior to this.

What God says in verse 16 is especially interesting. He describes Abram’s progeny as returning to the land He has given them to reclaim it. Apparently, they were to be brought out of Egypt very close to the time, within a generation, of the iniquity of the Amorites being completed. We read that the Israelites did retake the nation, slew their king and cohabited in their cities. Was this a great coincidence? Or in God’s perfect economy of justice, making things right? Was the Seed within Israel at work even then? Was it God’s desire that both nations would be made ready for their destinies through intertwined history? Israel was called to be the light of the world. So, was the outcome of each people group the loving kindness of God to spread a message of truth and hope? We read in

Acts 13:

19 “And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land to them (Israel) by allotment.”

It’s interesting that the word translated as destroy also means to take down in order to lift up, making that object one’s own in the process. We know that God was taking back the land for Israel but was He also taking the people in the lands to Himself? Was it His compassion for them who were lost in the pain and darkness of their iniquity, that which was full? I believe He was making a point for Abraham that the covenant included all of mankind. That He was doing what He does best, working all things to the good. For the God of Love would come to the Jew then the Gentile but He is Messiah of all men for He did it for all seven nations of Canaan. Seven being the perfect number of wholeness and completion.

Gen 15:

17 “Now it happened that the sun had set, and it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces.”

The darkness described isn't simply nighttime, it is, as mentioned, the darkness of man's fallen mindset in Adam.

Abram witnessed the condition and twisted mindset of the original man as he peered over the abyss at death itself and saw that it was total and complete separation from Love. The word for devil in Greek is *diablos* consisting of two words, dia meaning because of and ballo to cast down. It's the apt description of the fallen mindset in the life of rebellion in Adam. The mind in the darkness of sin is the loss of identity. It's an existence of being no one in a wilderness search for someone or something that is real. There's an occasional flicker of recognition that often goes dark again in fairly short order. It's like the man who observes his true self in the mirror, goes away and the dementia of sin in unbelief causes him to forget once more. It is perpetuated often by the church itself as we're told that we are simply depraved sinners saved by grace and no more. Thus, the message this side of eternity is get used to it, you're a nobody.

As Abraham slept, he dreamed of what he saw. Like all men, he was in bondage to the fear of death.

Yet because he had believed God it was counted to him for righteousness in covenant union.

The entire ritual was accomplished in order to reveal to Abraham man's true existence in God. For His role wasn't as “a” man but “as” man in total. The last Adam would become a life-giving spirit as and for all men. What Abraham was witnessing was the Gospel itself. For He who knew no sin became it, entering into death in order to resurrect all. He was observing God giving His “Word”. The Lord Jesus Christ, God and man, isn't making a promise; He is the promise that the everlasting covenant would never be broken. Where was Abram in this? He was in Christ who is the Firstborn of the many.

15:

18 “...the Lord made a covenant with Abram,” and the Lord made the same covenant with you.