



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Genesis 17: 1-8

The Sealing of The Covenant

TRANSCRIPT

Scripture reading for this morning is in Genesis, chapter 17 and we are reading verses 1 through 8. This, I believe is the 31<sup>st</sup>, yes the 31st of our series of the studies in the Book of Genesis and I know that we have been going rather slowly, but these chapters, the earlier chapters, particularly, are very important. Later on, we will be going much more rapidly through the Book of Genesis and I hope that we will be able to finish the book before too many months go by, but today is our 31st study. We will, however, spend two of our studies, the Lord willing, on the 17th chapter, which happens to be a rather important one. Chapter 17 verse 1 through verse 8.

“Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old,” (you remember the last verse of the preceding chapter gave Abram’s age as 86, when Ishmael was born, so this is 13 years later.) “Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, ‘I am God Almighty; Walk before Me, and be blameless,’ (or as the Authorized Version has it, ‘be perfect.’) ‘I will establish My covenant between Me and you, And I will multiply you exceedingly.’ Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying, ‘As for Me,’ (by the way, you will notice as you read through this chapter that this “as for Me” in verse 4 is parallel to verse 9 where God said further to Abraham, ‘Now as for you’, so this refers to Abram, particularly on God’s dealings with him. ‘As for

Me, behold, My covenant is with you’ represents God’s part of this arrangement.) “As for Me behold, My covenant is with you and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. ‘No longer shall your name be called Abram,’ (‘Abram’ means ‘exalted father.’) ‘But your name shall be Abraham,’ (Now philologists debate to some extent, the origin of this name, ‘Abraham,’ but the vast majority agree that it is intended regardless of its origin philologically to mean ‘father of a multitude.’) “Your name shall be Abraham; for I will make you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings will come forth from you. I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you, throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”

May the Lord bless this reading of His word.

The subject for this morning in the continuing exposition of the Book of Genesis is “The Sealing of the Covenant and Abram’s New Name.” The Hagar affair was no credit to Abram. How shorn of splendor he appears, listening to the voice of Sarah. “And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai” - we read in chapter 16 and verse 2. It is not surprising that a kind of pall of darkness falls over Abram’s story. We read that in the intervening 13 years, so far as Scripture is concerned, that there were no exploits of faith, no mighty works in which Abram was involved.

On the other hand, there was no apostasy. Abram, by the grace of God, was kept through to the Lord. One of the commentators has said, “Learn from this that if once we forsake the track of simple faith, once we cease to walk according to the purity which faith approves, we strew our path with thorns, cause God to withhold the light of His countenance from us, and pierce ourselves through with many sorrows.” The process of sanctification, however, continues because that is an unconditional work, too. We have been stressing that salvation is an unconditional work of grace. The covenant that God made with Abram is an unconditional covenant. It is one in which God

promises to accomplish His work and now He will accomplish His work through faith, but we read in Holy Scripture that it is He who is responsible for the faith by the which man receives the blessings of the covenant unconditionally.

Now once a man has become a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, he is then the object of the work of sanctification and the work of sanctification is also an unconditional work of grace. Abram has been called and Abram has been justified and Abram must be sanctified. The Apostle Paul puts it this way, “Being confident of this very thing that He which has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” So, my Christian friend! You can be sure of this one thing. Having believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, you shall be sanctified, He will do His work. Now, you may of course make it a little more difficult than some others, but He will do it, and if necessary, He will do it as you die, but He will do it. He will accomplish His work of sanctification. Therefore, this chapter through which we are to look now is an important one in theology because we will see again that the basic pattern of grace and answering faith provided by God is continued. The covenant that God gave Abram has been announced in chapter 12, it was ratified in chapter 15, and now it reaches its fruition.

We learn two important things in chapter 17. We learn that Sarah is to be the mother of the seed; up until this time that has not been revealed. It has been said that Abram shall have a seed and that seed should be the means of blessing to all the families of the earth, but the mother of the seed has been unknown, so far as Scripture is concerned, to this point. But here in chapter 17, we are told that it shall be Sarah. In the 16th verse, we read, “I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her. Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.” Now that is an important addition and of course, we will later on see how it comes to pass in the birth of Isaac.

And then the second thing that is especially stressed and which we will try to stress in some detail next week is that there is a sign of this covenant and the sign of the covenant will be the rite of circumcision. We read in the 11th verse, “And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin,

and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you.” So, the covenant is coming to fruition, Sarah is to be the mother of the seed, and circumcision is to be the covenantal sign.

Now, we also learn something of significance in this chapter 2 if we reflect upon it, it is this. Sanctification follows justification and this sanctification is, as I have been saying, a work divinely initiated and consummated. Now, I think it is important for us to notice that the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit does follow justification. We are living in days in which there has been some confusion of sanctification and justification, even in the ranks of evangelicals. We often hear people saying that, “One must make Christ the Lord of one’s life before he can be assured of his salvation.”

Now to make the Lord Jesus Christ the Lord of one’s life is the work of sanctification and not the work of justification. Now, if we are talking about the recognition of our Lord as Lord, that of course is a part of the pattern of justification, but the making of the Lord Jesus Christ the Lord of one’s life is the work of the Holy Spirit following our salvation. We learn this about the lives of the saints in the word of God. Their lives were not lives in which there was a steady growth in perfection. On the other hand, the lives of the saints have their ups and downs, constantly, and even Abram, after the heights to which he has already reached, we shall find that he will sin, and sin very embarrassingly, in the same way in which he sinned earlier. The lives of the saints are full of ups and downs.

Now there is a basic pattern of growth, but the making of Christ, one’s Lord, is the work of sanctification. Salvation takes place and then sanctification. They are both works of God, but one follows the other, and we need to keep this in mind. If you look at the lives of David, the lives of Abram, the life of Gideon, the life of Samson, one even wonders how Samson is found among the faithful until we read in the Book of Hebrews, that he was one of the men of faith. So, the process of sanctification is a process that continues. We should expect to find growth, and a pattern, but not perfection.

When we talk about the perseverance of the saints, we do not mean that the saints persevere in purity, constantly. We mean that the saints do not ever apostatize from the faith. So, the

perseverance of the saints is a fact because of the preservation of our great God in heaven. Well, now let us take a look at chapter 17 and verses 1 through 8 and, of course, the first of the great topics that comes before us is the appearance of Yahweh or the Lord to Abram.

It is 24 years after Abram has migrated from Ur of the Chaldees. It is 14 years after the covenant has been ratified. It is 13 years after the birth of Ishmael. Abram is now 99 years of age. It would have been easy for Abram to forget the covenant, after all it had been 13 years, he had been living evidently with this pall of darkness over him, so far as the record is concerned, easy for him to forget the promises, at least to put them in the back of his mind, but it is obvious that God has not forgotten them, and he has been waiting for the fullness of time to bring that covenant to its fruition, and this is the fullness of time.

You will notice another interesting thing; the word “covenant” has been found only once preceding this in chapter 15, verse 18. But in chapter 17, we have the term, “covenant,” 13 times and so it is clear that this is a very chapter on the covenant and one in which God stresses that covenant. Why the long delay? Why the 13 years? Was it to test Abram’s faith? Well, perhaps. It surely would have been a test. It would have been a test of a number of years. “Has God forgotten his promises?”, Abram might have thought.

On the other hand, was it chastisement? Was it because of his failure in connection with Hagar? The Bible does not make that plain or it does not clarify the point. One thing I do know, the saints of God experience the silences of God. It is not surprising that we should have, in our lives, periods of time, in which it appears that God has forgotten us, in which there is no fresh illumination as we study the word of God, in which our lives have nothing unusual about them. No striking things take place. The psalmist had to contend with silences. The psalmist says, “Be not silent to me: lest, if Thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit.” So, they struggled over the silence of God. It should not be surprising if we too have to struggle over the silence of God, but it may be a test and we should respond thereby. If it is because of some sin, then

of course, the remedy is to confess that sin to the Lord and to resume, by the grace of God, the kind of life that we have been living.

Well, God appears, or the Lord appears to Abram and said to Abram, says to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be blameless. I will establish My covenant between Me and you.” Now, it might seem that God is making a bargain or suggesting a bargain with Abram. If you do this, then I will do this. But these words are not for bargaining. Everything that we have seen so far in these chapters and in the word of God as a whole, stresses the fact that God does not bargain with His saints. On the other hand, He may lay down conditions for the enjoyment of His blessings, and this is what we have here. This is not a bargain. If you do this, then I will do this, as if you do this in reward for your meritorious work, I will do this. But it is rather the statement of the condition for the enjoyment of the blessing of the covenant which He is giving in grace. “I am God Almighty. Walk before Me and be blameless, and I will give My covenant between Me and you.” That is, “You will come to experience the fruition of it.” So, this is that upon which God gives or maintains the covenant that He has given.

Let us stop for a moment and ask ourselves, what is meant by this marvelous revelation, “I am God Almighty?” Now, we could engage in a little bit of philology, Hebrew philology, but I want to pass it by, by simply saying this that while there has been a great deal of discussion over the meaning of this Hebrew expression, “El-Shaddai,” some have, for example, said that that word “Shaddai” comes from the word, “mountain,” that is quite popular and contemporary Old Testament scholarship. Others have suggested that the word comes from the Hebrew word which means “sufficiency.” Still others have suggested that it comes from the Hebrew word for “breast,” and finally others have suggested that it comes from the word “to destroy,” and there is some evidence that that latter derivation is the most likely one in the light of Joel chapter 1 and verse 15.

The vast majority of the commentators have agreed that the term “El-Shaddai” stresses the almightiness of God, and so it is translated here properly, “I am God Almighty.” Now, we have had three names for God so far. You remember the word “Elohim,” that is “God who creates and

preserves nature,” and then we have had “Yahweh”, He is the God who makes covenants of grace, and now God Almighty, and it is clear from the context in which it appears here and the remainder of the context of the Old Testament that this is the God who controls nature. So, Elohim – the God who creates, El-Shaddai – the God who controls nature, Yahweh or the LORD as it is often rendered in capital letters, the God who makes covenants with certain people in distinguishing grace.

Later in the Book of Exodus, we will read a text in which Moses writes that those preceding have not known God as Yahweh. The term is used here, but they have not known Him as Yahweh. In fact, it would appear that in the Old Testament, the patriarchs knew the Lord as El-Shaddai, God Almighty but to Moses, He comes to be known by virtue of the unfolding of the covenant in act as Yahweh, the Lord who makes covenants with His people. So, “I am God Almighty.”

It is almost as if God had appeared to Abram and said, “All power is Mine on heaven and in earth, and I am giving it to you. Of old, I have laid the foundations of the earth and the heavens are the works of My hands. I sit upon the circle of the earth. Its inhabitants are as grasshoppers. I bring out the starry hosts by number. I use all of my creation to accomplish my prophecies.” You can see that what is revealed here or suggested by this is that the Lord who appears to Abram is another anticipation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who later will say, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.” So, I guess that we can say this in Abraham’s case, the name that was especially dear to Him was “I am the Almighty God.” For Moses, the special name was “Jehovah,” “Yahweh.” For us, it is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, for a man to be thoroughly sanctified to the Master’s service, he must first realize the almightiness and all sufficiency and glory of God. These words that God speaks to Moses are extremely important. Notice where they occur. “I am God Almighty; walk before Me.” Now, what does that suggest to you? Well, that suggests to me this; that if we think little of God, then we will render little trust to Him, and consequently, little obedience. But if we have grand and glorious conceptions of God, then it is much more likely that our lives will be characterized by obedience and trust. There are people who very foolishly like to continue to say, in spite of exhortation, that is not

really significant that we know great things about God. It is important simply that we live our daily life in touch with Him. How foolish! How foolish! It is the grandness and the greatness of our conceptions of God which are given us through the word of God, through biblical doctrine, that build up our minds to a conception of Him that leads to faithful, devoted service to Him. The greater He is in our minds, the more likely we shall respond in obedience and trust to Him. The smaller He is, in our minds and hearts, the less likely it is that we will respond to Him. It is the man who has a great conception of God and His glory, all of His tremendous attributes, and understands something about them, who will do as Abram, who falls upon his face before the Lord and asks what it is that he is to do.

So, we preach the doctrines of the word of God with great practical aim and goal, that you be obedient to the truth of God and you will never be obedient to the truth of God until you have a great and glorious conception of the God of the word. So, we are not trying to cram your minds with doctrine so that you can go out and say, “I have a lot of doctrine.” You make yourself only that much more foolish to go out with a great conception of doctrine and not be obedient to it but, we give you the word of God and the grandness and greatness of our great God with a view to walking before Him. “I am God Almighty; walk before me.”

Now, I am sure that if Abram had known this, this great fact, he would not have acted as he did in chapter 16. When Sarah came to him with her suggestion, he would have said, “No, Sarah! I am sorry! God is God Almighty. He controls nature. He has given us a promise of a seed. Why should I scheme and device a plan to accomplish His will when He is able to bend all nature to accomplish His purpose?” No; I remain true to God Almighty. He can affect His purposes without my taking tortuous means to accomplish them.” So, this is not unimportant.

“I am God Almighty; walk before Me,” not before Sarah. That is what Abram had been doing. He had walked before Sarah. She had made a suggestion; he listened to the voice of Sarai. No, it is not bad because she was a woman. As a matter of fact, he listened to his own voices. He

listened to the voices that came from himself but he did not listen to the Lord God. That is the important thing. “I am God Almighty; walk before Me.”

Some have suggested, this is a lower standard than that which we read of Enoch and Noah. I cannot see that myself. It is said in the earlier chapters that Enoch and Noah walked with God. And that is a higher standard than walking before Him. Well, I confess I find that very difficult to grasp. To walk before God seems to me to walk with the eyes of God upon all of our affairs. It means that we do not run ahead of Him. It means that we do not hang back behind Him as if we are afraid that He will examine our steps but we walk before Him. That is desirous of His approval, of His pleasure. “Walk before Me and be blameless.”

Now, a great deal of discussion has taken place over this “be blameless” or “be perfect,” and some have erected out of texts like this, the doctrine of sinless perfection, as if it is possible. I must suggest to you that as far as the text is concerned, I do think that when it says, “be perfect” or “be blameless,” we are not to understand by this something less than perfection. Can you imagine this Holy God suggesting to us, “Walk before Me and be almost perfect?” How would you like that? “Walk before Me and have a passing grade in holiness, 70.” Of course not. We should expect a totally holy God and infinitely holy God to have a standard of perfection.

I find no difficulty in accepting that as the teaching of the word of God. The Apostle John said, “These things I write unto you that you sin not,” not that you sin not often or something like that. So, to be blameless, to be perfect, well, it would be all right to say the standard is the standard of perfection. The word, however, probably does not quite connote that idea. The Hebrew word has the idea of soundness. “Be perfect” in the sense of being sound, I think that the idea is wholeheartedness, the kind of thing that Job had, the kind of thing that David had, for God was pleased with Job.

“Have you considered My servant Job? He is a man who is perfect.” Wholehearted, not perfect in the sense of sinlessly perfect, but he was a man who was given over to the Lord. There was that fundamental relationship to Him, and the same true of David; David, the adulterer, the

murderer, but nevertheless, a man after God’s own heart, not because he was sinless or sinlessly perfect, but because he had given himself to the Lord. Caleb, a man who was not sinless, but a man who wholly followed the Lord, that is, there was that fundamental wholeheartedness, a giving over of his life to the Lord. Now, that I think is the fundamental need of believers: to give themselves over to the Lord. There is no such thing as perfect surrender in this life, in my opinion, but there is such a thing as wholeheartedness, in which the priorities of our lives are rearranged and the Lord has first place.

Now, notice, we have everything here that we find in the Pauline Epistles, but expressed an ancient form. We have, “Walk before Me,” that sound mysticism, that is a recognition of who God is, what He desires of us, biblical doctrine. “Walk before me and then be blameless,” conscientious conduct, doctrine in duty. “Walk before Me” in the light of certain conceptions found in the revelation for us, the New Testament as well as the Old Testament and then “be blameless,” the cause of failure and neglect is right here.

Now, if of course, Abram had responded to this, what a different experience he might have had. And, isn’t it great to realize now at least after this, that he has God Almighty above and around him. In other words, the resources of an omnipotent God must be exhausted before there is cause for want or lack in our lives. “I am God Almighty.” Now, I do not know how you feel, but to me, that is tremendous in encouragement, to think that God Almighty is for me. Therefore, I do have the resources of an infinite God to call upon.

That would mean to me, Men, if you are in business, and if you have difficult problems before you, the God who is all sufficient, the God who is Almighty is the God upon whom you can depend in the problems that you face. That means that if you have difficulties in your family, the God who is Almighty has all of the resources necessary to solve the problems. This past week, I received a call from a weeping woman because of difficulties in the family. Now if in families such as this, if there were recognition of, “I am God Almighty,” those problems could find their resolution. And if a man believes, though he is poor, that God is sufficient portion for him, he will not grow

envious of the rich or discontented with his condition because if he has the Lord, what are the few shekels in comparison with that? He is rich, he is rich. We are rich when we believe in Jesus Christ. What difference does a big or a small bank account if we have the riches of heaven? “I am God Almighty; walk before Me and be thou perfect.”

Now He goes on to say I will establish my covenant between Me and you and so the covenant is to be made operative now, I think that is force of what we find in this chapter. We are drawing near to the fullness of time when God is going to bring to pass these promises and I would gather too that since in verse 3 through 5, where were we have the pledge of further covenantal blessing, that in the light of the fact that these verses follow that command to walk before Him, that consecration must be fostered by enlarged views of the covenant.

In other words, sanctification is also made to abound by virtue of further knowledge of the working of God. “Walk before Me and be thou blameless. As for Me, My covenant is with you.” In other words, the promises of God are intended to support the believer in his life of sanctification, which impresses upon me at least again the importance of the knowledge of the truth of God for sanctification and there again how foolish it is then for a man to say, “We are not interested in theology, let’s put that aside, let’s talk about life.” That is thoroughly contrary to biblical teaching.

You can see that for him, life is dependent upon what we know about God, not knowledge simply for knowledge’s sake, but knowledge with a view to walking before the Lord. So, “Walk before me. As for me, I am going to do this.” So, the truth of the covenant undergirds the practical daily life of Abram, affects everything that he does. How often when I hear someone says something like that, I want to stand up and shout “That is heresy! Sit down, quit upsetting the saints of God. You are like a wolf among the sheep and lambs!” But they do it with such a sweet, little face that I am put off by it, and I guess may be it is best that I shouldn’t get too excited and mad, but deep down within, I am really disturbed when I hear something like that.

One of the commentators says he has known Christian, “When they are conscious that they have not lived as they ought to live, begin to doubt their interest in Christ and as they say, humble

themselves in order to reach after fuller sanctification of life. That is to say they starve themselves in order to grow strong. They throw their gold out of the window in order to become rich. They pull up the very foundation stone of their house to make it stand secure.

“Beloved believer! Sinner is thou art! Backslider is thou art! Still believe in Jesus. Let not thy sense of sin weaken thy faith in Him. He died for sinners. In due time, Christ died for the ungodly and He exhorts us to cling to the cross,” that is Mr. Spurgeon.

Rightly so, because you see our salvation depends ultimately upon the objective work of the Lord Jesus in giving the atoning sacrifice and do not let talk of sanctification disturb the foundation of faith and trust in Him to which you have been brought by the Holy Spirit. Your salvation depends upon the objective work of Christ and the work of the faith which the Holy Spirit has wrought in you and it depends upon that, not upon the life that one lives thereby, though of course there should be evidence of the new life.

This past week, I received a telephone call from an old friend of mine, we have not talked in months, who is a former Braniff pilot, who was with Believers Chapel in the early days when we were in the schoolhouse over on Midway Road, and he used to sit on about the second row and I think I have mentioned this to you before, but he would sit there.

He was one of the greatest of the pilots that I have ever known. He would have been a man that, of all the pilots I know, I would rather have him flying the plane. He was meticulous in all of the aspects of his life. He determined years ago when he was young to retire at 50 and he did. He planned this life and God was with him. Everything about him was careful and I would have been as relaxed as one could be with a pilot and he came to the meeting and he walked in once when I was taking the collection in another church and was saying, “Now the offering is like the communion. It is for believers. If you are hear this morning and you have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, the offering is not for you. It is for believers. Your first responsibility is not to put money in the collection plate but by the grace of God to believe in our Lord Jesus Christ.

“When the offering plates are passed it is not in order that we may ask for your money. God has brought this organization, this church into being, and He will therefore supply its needs. We look to him. If you are a believer, it is your privilege to give and you may give.”

And he told me afterwards, he said, “I have never been in a church like that.” He said that is the church for me and started attending, and whenever I would about speak about the cross of Jesus Christ and the sufferings, I could look over in this hard man, he was really a hard man, unemotional man, and I see these great big tears begin to course down his face. It was always an encouragement to me, and deep down within, I would say, “Lewis, you are getting home today, go to it.” [Laughter]

When he called me this last week, we talked for about an hour, he is living in another state now and we haven’t talked in a good while, and he reminded me of the fact that he had come to Dallas once, he was representative of the pilots to talk with the headquarters about some salaries for the pilots, and he was sitting in a hotel room and he said, “in those days I was very concerned about my own salvation and I was reading the Bible and finally and I came to that text that says Christ Jesus died for sinners, and he said, “there came over to me this tremendous feeling, hallelujah, I qualify for I am a sinner!” He said, “After that I never had any problems of my salvation.” The Lord Jesus died for sinners. How true it is!

Now, Abram having received these great promises, falls upon his face and we read of the divine promises as they are expanded and enlarged. Incidentally, this would suggest the true sanctification begins at the feet of God and Abram is appropriating the promises on his face before the Lord, not a bad place incidentally to appropriate the promises of God, upon your face.

The new promises are given in verse 4, some of them, “As for Me, behold My covenant is with you and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations.” Three times, not simply the one in whom all the families of the earth shall be blessed, not simply the father of a great nation, but the father of a multitude of nations, and then he was given a new name, because after all this is a new occasion. We are going to have a covenantal sign given and the covenant is now being brought to

fruition and in honor of that. God changes his name. “No longer shall your name be exalted father, but your name shall be father of a multitude.”

Now, this I think is one of the most interesting things in this entire chapter. At 70, Abram’s name was Abram, “exalted” father, and yet he was barren. The Orientals are very inquisitive. I have some Oriental kinds of friends. They come up to me all the time and say, “Dr. Johnson, you mind if I ask you a personal question?” You never can tell what will come when they say that. I have gotten some of the strangest questions. I guess people are interested in a preacher, particularly young boys who may be thinking about the fact that they too, one of these days, might have the hand of God laid upon them to preach the word.

Well, all Orientals were like that and Abram was a rich man. You remember back in Chapter 13, verse 2, we read now, “Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver and in Kruegerrands.” [Laughter] He was prepared for inflation. And in those days it was customary for a person who came by with flocks needing the things that flocks need, water and sustenance, they would stop and it was the responsibility of those along the way to give help to anyone who is traveling, and they would invite the man and be hospitable to them and so the questions would come.

What is your name? Exalted father! Oh! What a wonderful name. How old are you? I am 99. Are you married? Oh, yes, I am married. How many children then do you have? None.

Exalted father, no children. Or I guess, I can imagine them saying your name is exalted father, congratulations, how many children do you have? And it was a galling thing for Abraham constantly year after year to have to say, “I have none,” and then try to explain himself. There was a lot of snickering going on, back in the ranks, back behind the tents, no doubt. One commentator writing of this in another book, not on the Book of Genesis, said that he had known of two men, one of them was named “wrench”, and he said this person said that people always came up to him and said, “Are you Mr. Monkey Wrench or are you the left-handed Wrench?”

And then another man by the name of Meek who divided all of his acquaintances and the people that he met under two classes, those that did not make a joke about this name and those who

did. And usually the joke was are you the Mr. Meek who is going to inherit the earth? And I can imagine, how tired they got of answering that.

So Abram, you can just imagine the years of embarrassment. One morning, he came down to breakfast, came into the tent, the maids in the back were cooking bacon and eggs, that is the best breakfast there is as far as I am concerned, and as Abram sat down, he said I have an announcement to make -- and after all he was as the Germans say, their chef, that is the boss -- and so there was quiet, and he waited. He said, “I have changed my name.” “Ah,” someone said, in the back, “He couldn’t not take it; the old man finally could not take it.” “Exalted father” and all he has got is Ishmael from Hagar.

He said my name is no longer going to be “exalted father”, it is going to be “father of a multitude,” [laughter] and you can just imagine them saying, “What do you know?” Some of them said the old man has gone around the bend. And then some said, no doubt, “Well, after all he had one child by Hagar and now he is beginning to get ideas.” [Laughter] You can just see this is a most amazing situation. “I am Abraham from now on.” And after all, it was no problem to the Lord, the same God who said, “Let there be light,” even though Abram now is past the age of begetting and Sarah’s womb is dead, the God who said, “Let there be light,” can say, “Let there be Isaac,” and we know that is exactly what happens. He calls the things that be not as though they were and it does not make a bit of difference whether Sarah’s womb is dead or whether Abram is 99 or 199 years of age. It is by the almighty power of El-Shaddai that the things are accomplished.

Well, the last few verses unfold and expand further the Abrahamic promises, verse 6, “I will make you exceedingly fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings.” Ah! That’s new! Kings! In other words, the seed that is to come is to be a royal seed. Now, this is unfolded later on in the Bible when we learn about the Davidic covenant, “And in Abram’s seed, the authoritative reign and rule shall be found.” And ultimately, this is not only David and the successors of David, sons of David, but the Son of David, the Lord Jesus Christ. “Kings shall come forth from thee and I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for

an everlasting covenant.” The covenant, the land promises are all everlasting. Therefore, no action of Abram can permanently sever him and his seed from blessing.

If the covenant is an everlasting covenant, if the blessing is everlasting, if the land promises are everlasting, if the words are everlasting promises, then nothing that Abram can do can sever him from the fulfillment of these blessings. Now, of course, disobedience may delay the fulfillment, but it is an everlasting covenant and everlasting promises are given. It is, in other words, an unconditional arrangement. And He says in verse 8, “I will give to you and your descendants after you, the land of your sojourning, all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession; they shall have it,” and the climactic word is, “I will be their God.”

Now, I would like to suggest to you that when we see here, “I will be their God,” that is the climactic word of all the promises because, my dear Christian friend, when we have God, we have everything. There isn’t anything left. All the promises abound up in him, and when you have him, you have the promises and the promises are worthless without him. So, this is the climactic word. It is the climactic thought of the Old Testament and the New Testament, and when God finally dwells with His people, and they are his people, and he is their God, then we have the consummation of the plans and purposes of God. Now that, my Christian friend, is distinguishing grace, for not everybody is included.

Well, do you wonder if Abram ever asked himself, “Can it all be true, can it possibly come to pass?” Well, if he did, a quick look at the revelation would have silenced all his doubts, “I am God Almighty.” Did you notice the “I wills” and “shalls?” Listen, verse 2, “I will.” “I will.” Verse 4, “You shall be.” Verse 5, no longer “shall your name be,” but “your name shall be.” “I will,” verse 6. “I will.” “I will.” Verse 7, “I will.” Verse 8, “I will.” “I will.” Look at the shalls and wills. Oh! Those glorious wills and shalls! Mr. Spurgeon says, “Brethren, you cannot serve the Lord with a perfect heart until first your faith gets a grip of the divine will and shall.”

Now, can you imagine Abram standing before the Lord, thinking about all the things that might destroy this relationship? Can you not hear him wanting to know the answers to questions? I

think, I can. I think I can imagine Abram standing before the Lord and hearing all these I wills and I shalls and saying finally, “But Lord, suppose my posterity become idolaters!” God responds, “I will bless you.” “Suppose Lord, I get out of Your will!” “I will bless you.” “Suppose my descendants crucify the Son of God!” “I will make of thee a great nation.” I can think of some others. Suppose Abraham becomes a liar and teaches Sarah to lie, breaks his side of the covenant, “I will bless him.” Suppose if grandson, Jacob, becomes a crook, “I will bless him.” Suppose his greatest son David becomes an adulterer and a murderer, “I will bless him.”

“Why Lord?” “Because I am God and not man, and I will some day through my apostle,” the Apostle Paul writes, “If we are faithless, He remains faithful for He cannot deny Himself.” “But Lord, that’s grace without merit.” “Ah! Yes. That’s unmerited grace.” That’s it. It’s unmerited grace. That is the basis upon which He deals with His saints, unmerited grace. That is why you are in the fold, if you are in the fold. That is why you are a child of God, if you are a child of God. He sought you out, laid His hand upon you, has drawn you to Himself.

I must tell you this in just a sentence or two if I may. This past week, I called upon a man in his very desperate condition. So far as human things are concerned, there is no hope. Not long ago, so far as we can tell, in his family, he was not a believer, nor was his wife. It was a great joy to me to sit by his bed and hear him affirm his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, even asked me to perform his funeral service, not far from the presence of the Lord. Well, in wonderful grace, God has reached out and touched him. His wife with tears in her eyes, the first time I think she had really cried, so I am told, in a long time, over things like that. It is the wonderful grace of God that reaches out and touches us. Unmerited grace. Unmerited distinguishing grace.

If you are here this morning and you have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, the objective work of the cross of Calvary is with the remedy for sin and sinners, and if you are here this morning, and the Son of God, through the Holy Spirit, has brought conviction to you that you are a sinner and that you need the hope and assurance that comes from the forgiveness of sins, it is there for you, in the blood that was shed.

May God, through the Holy Spirit, touch your heart. May you come, the days of opportunity, diminish as your life unfolds, may God work mightily in your heart, may you come. Come to Him. Put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and come to know the assurance that everlasting life, the comfort, and the assurance even in the midst of the last and darkest days of one's life; a man who can smile upon his deathbed because his faith and trust is in Christ. May you come to Christ. Let us stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are so grateful to Thee for these great promises, unconditional, unmerited grace. How wonderful it is know that we stand upon the same basis before Thee! Thou hast been gracious to us. We express to Thee Lord, our gratitude. We do love Thee. We praise Thy name. We desire to please Thee. Enable us in wonderful grace to walk before Thee and be blameless and for those here who have not yet come, O' God, through the Holy Spirit, draw them to Christ. May grace, mercy and peace go with us.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.