

# “Belong to Me”

Genesis 17:9-14

Halifax: 26 July 2015

## Introduction:

Today, we will carry on with our sermon series in Genesis.

- Presently we are in Genesis 17 where we find the LORD graciously expanding upon and verifying His covenant with Abram.
- Last week, we saw that God once again declared the very essence of His covenant promise—that He would be a God to Abram and to his seed.
  - This is an astounding thing for God to say to any member of the human race after the fall.
    - At the fall, Adam, the father of us all, spoke for us all when he renounced God as the God of the human race, bringing us all under God’s curse.
    - And as we are Adam’s children, we are born in sin and are by nature children of wrath, cut from God.
  - But with Abraham we have seen that God, in unfathomable mercy and grace, come to Abram and said, “I will be your God.”
    - It is a restoration of His relationship with a fallen sinful man!
      - And we saw, here in Genesis 17, that God not only promises to be a God to Abram, but also to Abram’s seed (his descendants),
        - And He promises that he will have lots and lots of descendants—and even that other nations and kings of other peoples will become God’s own people with Abram.
        - To enforce that promise, we saw that God changed Abram’s name to Abraham which means “father of a multitude.”
      - And we saw also that God promised to give Abraham and his seed the land of Canaan as an everlasting inheritance where God would be their God and walk among them...
        - And that this was nothing less than the promise of the new heavens and the new earth where righteousness would dwell.
        - To receive the land that he did not receive in this world as an everlasting inheritance, Abraham must be raised from the dead.

All of this God said He would do!

- If you look at Genesis 17, you will remember how in verse 4 the LORD says, “**as for me**” and how in verse 9 He says, “**as for you.**”
  - When He says “**as for me,**” He is telling what He will do in the covenant; and when He says “**as for you,**” He is telling Abraham what he is to do.
- So last week, we looked in particular at what God said He would do,
  - And this week, we will look in particular at what God tells Abraham to do regarding the covenant in verses 9-14.

- So let's read that together—Genesis 17, beginning in verse 9.
- This is God's holy and infallible word.

**Genesis 17:9-14: And God said to Abraham: “As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. <sup>10</sup> This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; <sup>11</sup> and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. <sup>12</sup> He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant. <sup>13</sup> He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. <sup>14</sup> And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.”**

May the LORD bless the reading of His holy Word.

So here you have summarised what Abraham and his descendants are to do...

- In essence, we have here what everyone is to do when God establishes His covenant with them.
  - When He said, “As for Me,” in verse 4 He tells what He will do for us...
  - And when He says “As for you,” in verse 9 He tells what we are to do in response because, according to Galatians 3:29, anyone who is in Christ is Abraham's seed and an heir of God's promises.

### **I. So what does God say you are to do if you are in His covenant?**

A. It is very simply and succinctly stated in verse 9. He says, **You shall keep my covenant.**

- That is it—you are simply to keep the covenant that God has established with you.
- There is nothing fancy about this at all. Just do your part.

B. And what does God's covenant involve?

1. Well let me remind you what God's covenant is at its core.
  - I just reminded you in the introduction, but what is it at its core?
  - Look again at Genesis 17:7.
    - It is that God will be a God to you and to your descendants.

➤ So if the covenant is that God is going to be your God, what does that leave for you to do?
2. You are to be His people! That is what is required of you.
  - You are to enter into relationship with God as your God—to take Him as your God.

- You are to serve Him as your God, to love Him as God, to trust Him as your God, to walk with Him and to be blameless.
  - In the fall, our relationship with God was broken, but in His gracious covenant, God restores your relationship with Him again...
    - so that once again, He can be your God and the God of your children.
    - You simply come and belong to Him.
3. Now if you are paying attention, you will say to me,
- “but it is not so easy to do that—I fail—I am a sinner—and even if I try to live for God, I fail.”
    - Of course you do! So did Abraham!
  - a. God knows that we are fallen sinful people—He knew that when He made this covenant with us.
    - And that is the most wonderful thing about Him doing it.
    - When He says to sinners, like Abraham and like all of us, that He will be our God, He knows that He is talking to sinners!
      - Yet, He says it anyway—“**I will be your God.**”
  - b. When He says He will be the God of sinners,
    - It implies He is going to fix us...that He is going to do whatever is required to take care of the sin—the guilt, the defilement, the stubborn presence of it!
      - He is going to take care of everything and all you are called to do is come to Him, trusting, and following as well as you can.
    - The very fact that you even want to come to Him and to have Him as your God is proof that He has already begun to work in you.
      - He has taken the first step to give you a new heart so that you would obey His call—and He will do all the rest...
        - He has also provided for your forgiveness—in Jesus Christ—and He tells you to believe in Christ when you come to be His.
  - c. You would be an absolute idiot if you thought you could do all that is required of you to have God as your God!
    - There is absolutely no way!
      - That is what the people were starting to think at Babel—
        - that they could build a tower that would give them a voice with God—it was the beginnings of idolatry—self-help religion...
        - They had plans to do it all themselves—to gain access to God, to make themselves great, to make themselves secure and blessed...
          - It is great folly to think that way!
      - But you remember that when God first came to Abram, He told him that *He* would do all of these things for Abram by grace...
        - *He* would make him a great nation.

- *He* would bless him
- *He* would make his name great
- *He* would make him a blessing to others
- *He* would make him secure.

TRANS> And so you see for a sinner to have God as his God means that that sinner looks to God for his salvation—not to his own efforts.

- You must come to God to walk with Him by grace through faith, otherwise you are not really coming to God at all.
  - God’s part in the covenant is to be our God, though we are sinners...
  - And our part is to place ourselves in His hands as His people
    - To come to Him as His people with our children for salvation, believing His promises and obeying His statutes, ordinances, and commandments.
    - That is what we do when we obey God’s call in verse 9 that says,
      - **“As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations.”**
- You simply come to Him and belong to Him.
  - And you see here in Genesis 17:10 & 11 that:

## II. **The LORD tells you how to show that you and your children belong to Him—that He is your God and that you are His people...**

- **He shows you how to place yourself in His hands—how to come to Him...**

A. Simply receive the mark of ownership that He has appointed in your day.

1. At the time of Abraham, the mark of the covenant was circumcision.
  - Look at verses 10 & 11: **This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.**
- a. Circumcision, as it says, was the cutting away of the flesh of the foreskin.
  - Other ancient peoples practiced circumcision for a whole variety of reasons—some of them very foolish and vile,
    - but the LORD appointed this rite for His people to mark them out as His own people who were in covenant with Him, looking to Him for salvation.
- b. This bloody rite may seem like a strange way for God to mark out His people, but it is really quite appropriate.
  - Abraham had been told that he was to bring forth a son through whom all the nations would be blessed.
    - In fact, God had already promised this to Adam just after the fall, and now we see that the son is to come through Abraham...
    - But God has been showing Abraham that bringing forth this son is not something he can do by his own strength.
    - Abraham and his wife Sarah are barren, and now Sarah is past the age to bear children

- By all of this, the LORD is emphasising that bringing forth the child of promise is a supernatural work!
- And now He appoints circumcision for Abram.
  - And what part of his body does circumcision pertain to?
    - The very part that is used to be fruitful and multiply—
    - The very part that is supposed to be used to fill the earth with a godly seed.
  - And the rite of circumcision says,
    - “There is something wrong here!”
    - “You cannot do what you are supposed to do.”
    - “All you can bring forth is wicked, corrupt, sinful children.”
    - “There needs to be a cutting away of your sinful corruption.”
  - Symbolically, the sinful flesh of the whole man is represented by the foreskin—a part representing the whole...
    - It is saying,
      - “You who are supposed to be filling the earth with fruit need to be cut and cast away and raised up new.”
      - “You cannot do what you are meant to do unless the sin is cut out of you—you must be sacrificed.”
- c. But when Jesus comes, He is free from sin.
  - He is not like any other man.
    - He is born of a virgin, and He is without sin—and He is the one God sends to bring forth His righteous kingdom in this sinful world.
    - He is the one who can fill the earth with godly people!
  - But to do this, blood must be shed.
    - The people in the kingdom are ruined sinners, and the sin must be cut away and sacrificed and that would destroy them...
      - But Jesus Himself who has no sin becomes the circumcision for the whole body of His people.
      - He takes the part of the unclean, the defiled, the flesh that must be cut away in blood and pain.
  - Jesus is Himself called the circumcision because He is the one who is cut off for the sins of the whole body.
    - He is the head, and He had to bear the shame of what is cut away and sacrificed to atone for sin so that the whole body might live.
      - It is both a terrible and beautiful picture of what God does in Christ to save.
      - He becomes sin for us, meaning that our sins are charged to Him, and then He is cut off and rejected and destroyed until the sacrifice is accepted, and then He is raised up again!
        - He is the one who was cut off for the whole body of the church!

- And as soon as He finished this awful work, the sign of circumcision was changed.
- 2. In the New Testament, the sign to mark out God's people was changed from circumcision to baptism.
  - a. Circumcision looked at what needed to be done—the cutting off of the sin of God's people—the bloody cutting off of sinful flesh...
    - but baptism looks at the cleansing that comes from what has already been done.
    - Do you see the difference?
      - Circumcision remained until Christ fulfilled it by being cut off for the whole body...
      - And then baptism came to say to us,
        - Now that Christ has been cut off for you, you need to be cleansed by Him—
          - You need to have His saving work on the cross applied to you to wash away your sin...
          - You need to have His death and His blood and His cutting off counted for you so that you can live in God's righteous kingdom.
  - b. Paul speaks of this in Colossians.
    - In Colossians 1, he speaks about how everything we need is found in Christ—
      - That is, we enter God's righteous kingdom by trusting in Christ by which we are joined to Him—joined by faith.
      - And there is nothing else needed because Christ has everything to make sinful people acceptable to God...
        - He has righteousness for us and He has a sacrifice of atonement for us, so in Him we have everything we need for acceptance with God—for justification...
    - And then in Colossians 2:11 & 12, Paul shows how baptism applies the circumcision of Christ to us...
      - It takes the cutting off of Christ and it associates it with us as those who are looking to Him to be washed and cleansed.
      - It says:
        - **Col 2:11-12: In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.**
      - In other words, we come to Him, and the radical measures that circumcision showed needed to be done are done...
        - Sin is cut away and pardoned by His death.
        - Now we are marked out as belonging to God by baptism instead of circumcision because Jesus has come.

TRANS> So we conclude that circumcision was the sign that a person belonged to God from the time of Abraham until the time of Jesus,

- And from then on the sign of belonging has been baptism.
  - To be circumcised now would be to go backward and say that we still need Jesus to come.
  - So God's sign of inclusion and belonging for us is baptism.

B. But who is to be marked out with the sign of God's covenant (the sign of belonging)?

- Well of course those who belong to God are to be marked out with the sign of belonging!

1. With circumcision, we are told in our text who belongs to God in His gracious covenant.

a. First, Abraham was to be marked out—the man of faith who trusted God's promise of grace!

- The time that he was to be marked out was on the day that God appointed circumcision to be the sign of His covenant.
  - Abraham belonged to God by faith, so he was to be given the mark of belonging.
  - He was an adult who already belonged to God, but he was to be given the sign as an old man because that was when God appointed the sign.

➤ But he is not the only one.

b. God tells him that every male child born to him is also to be marked out.

- The sign was not given to the females, but it certainly applied to them too.
  - If the man could not be fruitful and fill the earth with godly people, neither could the woman.
    - It was enough to show the problem with the man—to show that both men and women needed to be cut off and cast away before a righteous kingdom could be established.
- But every boy among God's people was to be given this sign, and they were to be given it on the eighth day.
  - This is a wonderful thing because it showed that God counts the children of His people to be His people along with their parents.
    - Even though they are sinners who must have their flesh destroyed to be saved, they are nevertheless God's people too.
  - Before children could speak for themselves,
    - God commanded that they be marked out as His people.
  - Parents were to put their little ones into God's hands to be saved and then they were to teach their children that they had been placed in God's hands according to God's gracious instruction.

- c. And not only that, but God commanded that Abraham's household servants be given the sign as well!
    - His salvation was not just for the master of the household, but also for all of the servants.
      - They too were to come to God to be His people by faith—to put themselves in His hands for salvation,
        - confessing that their flesh must be cut away and their sin atoned for.
      - If servants refused to come to God to be His people, they were to be sold and other servants were to be acquired.
  - d. And finally, I would add, though it is not mentioned here, that those from other nations who came to be God's people were to be circumcised.
    - When they saw their need,
      - When they saw that they could not be fruitful and fill the world with a righteous kingdom...but that God had promised to do this through Israel,
        - they were to come and be circumcised, to put themselves in God's hands as those trusting His promises.
    - This is clearly taught in Exodus 12 where the LORD speaks about those who wish to partake of the Passover.
      - In 12:48-49, it says: **And when a stranger dwells with you *and wants to keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it. One law shall be for the native-born and for the stranger who dwells among you.***
2. With baptism, it is quite similar...
- a. The first people to receive it were like Abraham—those who were already God's people, but received it in adulthood when it was instituted.
    - They received it when they heard God's promise of a righteous kingdom was at hand—
      - The son who would establish the righteous kingdom of God had come...they were to be baptised as if to say, "Count me in! Wash me!"
    - Take, for example, someone like Peter.
      - He was already circumcised and was already in covenant with God when John preached that the kingdom was at hand and that God had appointed the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins...
        - so Peter received baptism as an adult when he learned that God had commanded it.
  - b. And once again, the LORD also declared that children and household servants belong to Him and were to be given the sign of the covenant.



- In Acts 2 when Peter is commanding baptism of the many who were there, he declared in Acts 2:39 that **the promise is to you and to your children**—the promise of forgiveness and of a Spirit filled kingdom!
  - He said, “The promise is to you and to your children to be cleansed and to be marked out as my people.”
- In other words, things had not changed.
  - Just as the children of those who belonged to God also belonged to God in the Old Testament were given the covenant sign of circumcision to show that they belong to God, so they were to be given the New Testament sign of baptism to show that they belonged to God—that God was their God.
    - The mark of belonging is for them just as much as ever.
    - As would be expected, the pattern we see in the New Testament is of household baptism—servants and children in the household are baptised with the head.
  - They are to be given the sign that God is their God and that they are His people who belong to Him.
- c. And even more prominent the New Testament is proselyte baptism, because with the coming of Christ, God had promised to gather the nations to be His own.
  - Thus, when Jesus commissions His disciples to preach the gospel among the nations, He says:
    - **Matt 28:19-20: Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.**
    - They too are to be given the sign that God is their God and that they are His people who belong to Him when they embrace the gospel of the kingdom.