Praise the blessed name of Jesus

*For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Philippians 2:9-11

Jesus deserves to be exulted because He is God. But even more, as Paul talks about here, because He was completely obedient to the Father. He even suffered and died, which pleased the Father, because His death made it possible for God’s fallen creation to be restored to a relationship with Him.

God exulted Jesus by raising Him from the dead and had Him bodily ascend into heaven. Jesus is there now, and He is sitting on a throne at the right hand of God; the place of supreme honor. God is currently working His plan, which will put all the enemies of Christ under His feet.

Once God’s plan comes to pass, the name of Jesus will be proclaimed and its full majesty will be felt. No one will be able to resist bowing to Him and confessing that He is Lord of all. How satisfying it will be to see all the demons and satan worshiping the Lord whom they opposed. How tragic it will be to see all those people who refused the offer of salvation. How glorious it will be to see the myriads of angels and the redeemed praising the One who made salvation possible.

Make the choice now, to be in that last group. Be one of the ones praising Jesus out of joy and thanksgiving. Nothing on this earth is worth missing the abounding blessings that come with being in Christ.

In Christ’s love

John

11-6-22

Genesis 17:1-27

Sarai and Abram had devised a plan to move things along regarding the promise God made to Abram. Abram was promised a son. Because of her advanced age and lifelong barrenness, Sarai gave her Egyptian maidservant to Abram as a wife. Hagar conceived and bore a son to Abram named Ishmael. The problems began, even before the baby was born and Hagar ran away from Abram’s home and from the blessings that were his. But, God intervened, and had Hagar go back and submit to her mistress, Sarai.

Our study today begins thirteen years later. Abram has heard nothing from God in that time. It is doubtless that he loves his son, Ishmael, but there is now dissention in his house between the two women. He has had plenty of time to think; to consider whether or not he had acted faithlessly toward God.

Suddenly, God is there before him. He identifies Himself in no uncertain terms: “*I am God Almighty*”. This is immediately followed by a command: “*Walk before Me, and be blameless*”. To walk before God means to be loyal to Him. Abram is to have no other gods and do as God says. To be blameless does not mean to be sinless; that is impossible for human-beings. It means to surrender all of his life to God; it also contains the idea of loyalty. These are Abram’s part in the covenant God is about to establish.

Let’s consider the meaning of a covenant. In our times, we consider it to be more of a contract or a binding agreement. In these earlier times, it tended to be more of an agreement dictated to a weaker party by a stronger party. A king with a large army may come to a kingdom that is smaller and unable to defend itself against them. The first king will offer them protection and a chance to live as long as the smaller kingdom will swear loyalty. The smaller kingdom does not get to make demands of the larger; and if they refuse the offer, they face the consequences.

This is what we see here as God Almighty appears to the mere man, Abram. Obviously, it is a demonstration of God’s amazing love and mercy that He would even make this offer. Abram’s part is to surrender control of his life to God and be loyal to Him. In return, God offers a relationship with Himself.

Now, the beginnings of this covenant started earlier. God has promised Abram children and land and to be a blessing to all nations. God even gave a visible sign that held Him to His promises by walking between the carcasses of the animals. But here we see God saying of Abram and his descendants that He will be their God. The perfectly holy and just God of all is offering a relationship to sinful mankind. It is good for us to occasionally dwell on that: We have absolutely nothing to offer God. He is in no way indebted to us. It is only by His mercy that He offers us a covenant relationship.

We must also not forget that Abram’s righteousness came solely by faith. He believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. The Bible shows us that Abram failed and at times acted contrary to God’s desires, so he was considered righteous because of his faith not because of his works.

We as Christians are in a covenant with God. As God, He makes all the rules. Since we are the infinitely weaker party, we either take what God offers us or we face the consequences. Here is the covenant offer we have: Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as the One who has paid the price for all our sins. This means we understand that we aren’t good enough to be in relationship with God, and that faith in Jesus is the one and only way to come to God. He has done all the work and we accept the gift.

When we look to Him as our Saviour, we also look to Him as our Lord. This means that, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we are submissive and obedient to Him. We also understand that our adherence to rules and laws does not save us; it is one of the ways we show gratitude and worship our King.

As I mentioned before, the weaker party in a covenant is in no position to negotiate. This is demonstrated in verses 18 and 19. Abram just couldn’t understand or believe that Sarai could have a child, so he asked that Ishmael would be the recipient of the promises of the covenant. God’s answer was immediate and direct: “*No*.”

This is a concept that we find difficult to accept. Primarily, we are sinful human-beings who want things our way. We want to decide how to live and how our life should be. This is the attraction of the so-called “prosperity gospel”. It says that God will give us what we want and keep us healthy and all we have to do is ask. At its most basic level, this is giving us control of our lives while God just grants our wishes and makes no demands.

But God does make demands, and our lives have some very rough times. God uses these rough times to form us into the people He wants us to be: which is people who are like Jesus. We are living very much like Abram. He had God’s promises. Although he received good things from God in this life, he had to wait until the next life to receive the promises in full. We have the promise of eternal life in Christ and riches beyond measure. God does care for us in this life, but the fullness of the promises will come in the next.

It was often the case that when two kings entered a covenant, the greater king changed the name of the lesser. To change someone’s name demonstrated how much power was had over them. This is what God did with Abram and Sarai. Abram’s name changed from “exulted father” to “father of nations”. Sarai’s name was changed to Sarah, but both basically mean “princess”; an indication of the royalty that was to come from her.

Being a subject of God is not a bad thing. He is able and faithful to bring about His promises. The Biblical record shows that Abraham did have many nations come from him. Certainly, the nation of Israel, the people of God’s promise. But there were also the people of Esau, the Edomites. Midianites, Horites, Amalekites, and many others came from him. But even more important than the physical is the spiritual. In Galatians 3:29 Paul writes, “*And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise.*” We who are Christians, of all different nations, have become descendants of Abraham in Jesus Christ.

To be a Christian, to be in the covenant God has offered, is to be a servant. Again, by our human nature, we don’t like that, but that’s what it means to have Jesus as our Lord. Our Lord is someone who rules over us and we serve. In fact, He will change our names. Revelation 2:17, *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.’*

You can bet that Abraham’s servants weren’t keen on the idea of being circumcised; but when you’re a servant, you do what you’re told. Jesus wants to be Lord of every part of our lives; we don’t get to pick and choose which parts we keep Him out of. He must be over all of our lives because of the Christian doctrine of total depravity.

As we’ve mentioned before, total depravity does not mean that everything we do is evil; it means that all parts of our lives are touched by sin. Therefore, all parts of our lives need to be sanctified by Christ. Now, we won’t do this ourselves. But once we’ve said yes to Jesus for salvation, we have given Him permission to do what needs to be done. And He will sanctify us; we are His beloved people.

Our current life is a good time to practice being subject to Jesus as King. We proclaim that He is coming back and that He will rule the entire world. Scripture tells us that He will rule with a rod of iron. We look forward to the time of Jesus’ return and it will be a time of great goodness and wonder on the earth. But, especially in this country, we are not used to the idea of an absolute monarch, of a supreme ruler, of someone whose word is law: that is Jesus; it will be good for us to come to that understanding now.

God’s covenants have signs that go with them. For instance, the covenant with Noah and all the earth in which God said that He would never again destroy the earth with water, had the sign of the rainbow. The covenant God established with Abraham has the sign of circumcision. All the males associated with Abraham had to be circumcised or they could not be of the covenant God was establishing. The sign of circumcision has been important to the Jews ever since. It was established by God here with Abraham and was reenforced in the Law of Moses.

Circumcision was the outward sign of belonging to the covenant. It became necessary, in the eyes of the Jews, for salvation. This was a great point of contention in the early Christian church. They had to come to an understanding of the true nature of circumcision; that it was a symbol of something much deeper and more meaningful.

Early in the Old Testament came the hints that physical circumcision was just the shadow of something else. In Deuteronomy 30:6, Moses told the people: *Moreover the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live.* This indicates that something needs to change with a person’s heart; something needs to change with a person’s inner being: their mind, emotions, their very nature. Something has to change so that they can love God. And notice that the LORD is the one who has to do it.

In Jeremiah chapter 31, God talks about making a new covenant where His Law will be written on the heart. And Ezekiel 36:26 says, “*Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh*.” The prophets speak of a drastic change that will have to take place in the people of God. Changing the heart; circumcising the heart; making a new covenant that fulfills the ones that came through Abraham and Moses. Of course, the Holy Spirit revealed to the New Testament writers that this is through Jesus Christ and His work on the cross.

Paul writes in Romans 2:28-29, “*For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God*.”

Paul gets to the heart of the issue: In the spiritual matter of a right relationship with God, being a physical descendant of Abraham and being circumcised in the foreskin are not what it takes to attain salvation. It is when we accept Jesus as Saviour, that we become spiritual descendants of Abraham and that our very nature is changed by the work of the Holy Spirit. The letter of the Law does not save, the Spirit of God does. The necessity of inner spiritual change is shown in Colossians 2:11, *“[I]n [Jesus] you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ*”.

The circumcision made without hands is the change made in our heart by the Holy Spirit. Romans 6:6 speaks of our old man, our flesh with all of its rebellion and sinful desires, being crucified with Christ. This is the drastic removal of the flesh, of the sin nature: it is the circumcision of Christ.

God laid out the conditions of the covenant for Abraham and for Isaac and for the rest of the generations. Abraham asked for a change regarding Ishmael, and although God promised to bless him, God refused Abraham’s proposal. Once he got the message, Abraham lost no time in obeying his God. He and all his household received the covenant sign of circumcision.

As partakers of the covenant offered through Jesus, be sure that you have accepted the covenant sign of a circumcised heart. It is a big change and is often painful, but what God promises in return is beyond compare.

Prayer

God Almighty, as we learn from Ishmael, not everyone who receives the outward sign of Your covenant actually partakes of it. It is even possible to act as if we have received the inward sign of the covenant of Christ, when we really have not. I pray, Lord, that the power of Your Holy Spirit enlighten anyone here who may not have truly accepted Jesus as Saviour; convict them of that sin that they may truly turn to You for Salvation.

Lord, for those of us who own You as Saviour, I pray that You would continue to help us to crucify the old man; to put to death the sin that reigns in our flesh. Be patient with us Lord, and may Your Holy Spirit quiet the rebellion in our hearts. Sprinkle our hearts with that cleansing water that is necessary for our regeneration.

Thank You for the New Covenant that is in Jesus Christ. In Him, we have our rest from trying to achieve salvation. But we still have much work to do in this life. Give us courage and discernment; lead us in the good works You have designated for us from before the beginning of time. Send harvesters into the fields. And come Lord Jesus; we await our Master and King.

In Jesus’ name we pray

Amen