**Walk Before Me Faithfully and Be Blameless**

**Genesis 17:1-27 Key verse 17:1**

***“When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty; walk before Me faithfully and be blameless.”***

We thank and praise God for our Bible conference. In this conference we desire to listen to what our Lord wants to say to each of us. He says, "I am God Almighty; walk before Me faithfully and be blameless." The story of Abraham is the story of one man's walk of faith from idol worship all the way to the Kingdom of God. It is a story of many detours and at this time a complete stop; at times Abraham exercised great faith and at other times where he failed miserably. But through it all God was with him. God had made a promise and covenant with Abraham and although Abraham did not always keep his side of the bargain, God always remained faithful to the very end to His side of the bargain. God helped Abraham to grow in his faith until he could take hold of God's very Kingdom that was promised to him. In today's passage we want to look at the story of the longest time we know where Abraham was far away from God and how God came back to Abraham and reaffirmed His covenant to him and helped him to live faithfully and blamelessly from then on. May we learn from Abraham and in turn renew our relationship with our Lord and repent of our unbelief and everything else that has sidetracked our life of faith.

First, God appears to Abram after thirteen long years.

Look at verse 1a, "“When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him.” Between Gen. 16:16 and today's opening verse there was a 13 year gap. In Gen. 16:16, Hagar bore Ishmael for Abram. He was 86 years old! Finally, his desire for a child, a son was fulfilled! How happy he must have been! Has anyone ever longed for something so deeply, so longingly and finally their deep desire was fulfilled? Abram perhaps wanted many things in his life, but the overriding, overarching thing he wanted more than anything else was a son! And finally he had him, Ishmael!

And for 13 long years Abram was enjoying his life seeing his precious son grow up. He got to watch Ishmael take his first step. Watch him say his first word, "Apa". He watched him ride his first horse and shoot his first arrow, catch his first fish, catch his first rabbit. He went to everyone of his sons wrestling matches and watched him grow from an infant into a young boy. He must have been so happy! But was he really that happy? Even though he was so happy to have a son, the cost to have him was so great on his family. His beautiful wife Sarai had to endure such humiliation and the despising of her slave. When Hagar found out at first she was pregnant she despised her mistress. Sarai was so humiliated and angry. She complained and blamed Abram saying, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my slave in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the LORD judge between you and me." And so Abram told her, "Your slave is in your hands, do with her whatever you think is best." And so this gentle and quiet woman mistreated Hagar so badly that she ran away! All during the pregnancy Abram had to see his beautiful wife transform into an angry and bitter woman. Constantly hearing it was all his fault for what was going on! But he bore it, because he had Ishmael, but no one was truly happy. Perhaps, every night she burned Abrams dinner, if she prepared it at all anymore for him.

But Abram probably just ignored or made the best of the family situation he found himself in because he still had his son. But as his loved son began to grow up, he began to see that Ishmael was not everything he had hoped his son would be. Abram desired to be a noble, an exalted father, just as the Lord Almighty had been his exalted father. Surely, he loved Ishmael and tried to raise him properly. But as his son began to grow, he could start to see more and more the character of his son was not what he was hoping it would be. His mother Hagar would not allow her son to be corrected or taught anything by Sarai. Hagar was an Egyptian slave woman, she knew that God could see her, but she really had no deep personal faith or relationship with Him. And now that Abram had his son, his own relationship with God had become very distant. Once, Abram had hoped that his nephew Lot might be his heir, but over time he saw that he could never truly be his heir. He was a worldly man, a man of sight. Although he hoped against hope that Lot would be worthy to be his heir, he eventually came to realize he could never be. And the same conclusion was beginning to dawn to Abram concerning his son Ishmael. He desired that God's blessing would be with his son, but his son had no interest in God. Ishmael was rushing forward towards manhood. And although he was certainly loved by Abram and Hagar, his untamed, contrary spirit was evident to all. Ishmael was insolent and it would eventually be his undoing, when he mocked his younger half brother, Isaac. Most probably he began to listen less and less to his father and more and more to his mother, who probably spoiled him and gave him whatever he wanted, eventually even an unbelieving Egyptian wife later in his life. Abram inwardly hoped that handsome, dashing Ishmael despite his insolent ways, would somehow live under God's blessing. But deep down he could see that Ishmael was not the promised son, anymore than Lot was.

And so we see for thirteen long years there was a growing cloud of gloom and darkness about the promise that hung over the tents of Abram. The promise of God receded further and further into the back of Abram's mind, until it was but a faint, vague echo. "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you." It had been some 23 years since the initial promise. And now with the bleakness of the last 13 years, the promise seemed more distant than ever.

And it was at this very moment that God finally visited Abram. When all of Abram's hopes and dreams were completely dead, just like his body had become. God had given Abram a long time to think about his sin and his lack of trust in God's promises and to experience the consequences of his unbelief and compromised life. Abram was ripe to humble himself down before God and to listen to Him once more and this time no longer with a wavering faith or double-mindedness.

Second, "I am God Almighty!"

Look at verse 1b, "I am God Almighty." The first thing God did when He visited Abram was to introduce Himself to Abram with a new name, a name that Abram had never heard before concerning the Lord. God introduced Himself as El-Shaddai. It was by this name that the Patriarchs came to know God personally. As God later explained to Moses, "I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob, as God Almighty" (Ex. 6:3). God was called by this name most often when coupled with the promise of descendants. (Gen. 17:1-2; 28:3; 35:11; 48:3-4) God was saying, by this initial invoking of His name El-Shaddai, "I am able to fulfill the awesome hopes that I have set before you of a people and a land. There is no need to let go of the promise because of your old age. There is no need to diminish the promise to match your circumstances or shriveled thoughts-no need to resort to your own feeble attempts to fulfill My promise. Everything-all your life, all your future-lies in this: I am God Almighty!"

The same is true for us. How we see God is how we will live our lives of faith. The way we live our lives of faith is determined by what we think of God. If our God is El-Shaddai, God Almighty, then our lives will live out the fullness of God's promises to us. Any view of God less than the LORD Almighty will shrink our soul and neutralize our faith.

Third, "Walk before Me faithfully and be blameless."

Look at verses 1c-2, "[W]alk before Me faithfully and be blameless. Then I will make My covenant between Me and you and will greatly increase your numbers." God’s call is never to just believe that He exists. God calls for an active faith. God called for Abraham to walk before God and be blameless. We are counted as blameless through our abiding relationship, not just a one time believing His Word and His promises, but persevering in our faith till God accomplishes His promises in our lives. This reminds us of Jesus' Words in Jn. 15:4, "Remain in Me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me." The New American Standard says, "Abide in Me." Faith is not a one time deal. It is not like an inoculation shot, instead our faith is a continual abiding or remaining in Him till the very end, until the fulfilling of His promises in our lives, all the way to the Kingdom of God.

Our situation or circumstances is often a test of our faith. Time itself is also often a test of our faith. These two things are often the greatest tests for our faith, sight and time. This was the situation of Abram. He received God's calling and he followed the Lord, but he did not remain or abide in Him to the very end. When God led him to a land he did not know, Abram went, but when he saw the famine in the land, and that the land was already occupied, he turned away from the Promised Land and went to Egypt. His circumstances and situation kept him from walking or remaining with the Lord. Because he did not abide with the Lord till the very end, he could not take hold of the land that was promised to him. He detoured away from God and the promises God had given to him. The long march of time also challenged his faith, challenged him to persevere and remain in Him. After a long time of no son, Abram took his wife's slave as his wife and had a son, Ishmael. Again he did not walk faithfully with the Lord or remain blameless before Him. He not only took a detour in his life journey of faith, he took an extended pit stop; in reality he was ready to abandon the promise of God and live a compromised life, because time had eroded his faith and almost completely extinguished it.

But now God was telling him, "Walk faithfully with Me and be blameless." Abide with Me till the very end. Do not doubt any longer. Trust Me, I will surely do what I say I will do! Do not live by sight, do not waver between faith and unbelief, do not be double-minded, but abide in Me, walk faithfully before Me; do so, till the very end and I will surely make you fruitful!

Fourth, "This is My everlasting covenant with you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you."

Look at verses 3-8, "3 Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, 4 “As for me, this is My covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. 5 No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. 6 I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. 7 I will establish My covenant as an everlasting covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. 8 The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.”"

The first thing Abram did when God spoke to him was to fall facedown before Him. After 13 years, Abram was ready to listen to God Almighty. After all his failures, and having no more earthly hopes, he was finally ready to listen and fully believe God. He had tried everything in his power to take hold of God's promises for his life, but he came up short and failed miserably; Abram came to the end of his rope. He had nowhere to turn any longer. This Bible conference is a chance for us as a sacred assembly to humble ourselves down before the Lord Almighty, to repent our sins, especially our unbelief in the promises He has given to each of us. The next six hours after this message is a chance for us to fall facedown before the Lord and listen fully to Him. To reaffirm the covenant promise He gave to us. Until we are ready to fall facedown before Him and acknowledge our sin and unfaithfulness, our unbelief in His promises for our lives, we will not be able to be lifted up. 2 Chronicles 7:14 says, "[I]f My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from Heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land." James 4:7-10 reads, "7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up."

May God help each of us to humble ourselves before the Lord, that He will lift us up.

God Almighty told Abram that he would be the father of many nations. This was something that Abram could not see with his eyes. This was a long term promise that God gave him and to help him to hold onto this promise God Almighty changed Abram's name to Abraham. Even though Abraham could not see this with his own eyes, in God Almighty's eyes it had already been done. Abraham had to live by faith to hold onto this promise, to see it and know that it was already as good as done, because God Almighty said so. This was not positive thinking this was simply accepting God's covenant promise. God keeps His promise absolutely. God is absolutely faithful and He protects the honor of His Name absolutely. What He says, He does.

This covenant was not for Abraham alone. What God Almighty was promising to Abraham was not just to solve his individual and personal matter. God Almighty was establishing an everlasting covenant, a covenant that would continue even after Abraham, it was to go to his descendants after him. This was always God's great purpose and plan. Abraham originally saw the promise of God for himself, that he would have a son; that God Almighty would be his God. But God had in mind that He would in turn be the God of Abraham's son Isaac and his sons after him and so on and so on to this very day, to you and I. Our own matters that concern us, that God takes care of us is not just to solve our personal problems or matters, it is in mind of an everlasting covenant to our descendants after us. The promise and calling of God on my life was not just to solve my tragic childhood and to give me a family that I could enjoy and that I really did not have when I was young. God called me and even established me as His own son and gave me my family that it would not only be for me, but for my descendants after me. God is not only my God, but He is the God of my five sons as well and to all those who will believe the message of Jesus Christ through me and my descendants; beginning with my oldest son Peter and going on down to all five of my sons and even my daughter Maggie! I thank God for allowing my son Peter to share his testimony today. God is surely keeping His promise to me, in reality He already was accomplishing His great and wonderful purpose and plan on my life and in the lives of my children, both physical and spiritual. God is making us all very fruitful! Shep. William and Sarah's family has 6 beautiful children! Shep. Jason and Heather have 5! So does Msn. Philip and Sun Yung. Shep. Noah and Msn. Pauline have 4 lion cubs. Shep. Robert and Msn. Miriam have 3 young lions! The same is true of Shep. John and Msn. Providence! Msn. Billy and Shep. Connie have 2 lovely does and one growing gentle lion cub. Msn. John and Suzanna Choi, also have 2 daughters and 1 son; Shep. Greg and Jenelle have 2 precious and lovely children! Msn. Augustine and Msn. Petra have two awesome children, I really love their son Theo and daughter, Marilyn. Msn. Moses and Anna also have 1 handsome son and 1 beautiful daughter! Msn. Peace has 1 beautiful daughter! And the same with Msn. David Park. This is the exact number of children that Abraham had with his wife Sarah. And I truly believe that like Abraham and Sarah, in God's right time, Shep. Frank and Samia and Shep. Troy and Msn. Sarah will be very fruitful as well! I could go on and on; Msn. Taylor and Theresa's children; Msn. James and Julie Yu's family; Msn. David and Blessing Cho's children; Msn. James and Faith Park's family; Shep. Abraham and Msn. Lilia's family; Shep. James and Msn. Lydia's children; Shep. Jim and Doris' family; Msn. Paul and Esther Lim's family; even Msn. John and Maria's 2 daughters and Msn. Isaac and Rebecca Kim also had 1 son and 1 daughter and 4 granddaughters! God has surely made us very fruitful, just as He has promised He would. This years CBF Summer Bible conference had more children than we have ever had before. The same is true of the HBF/JBF Summer Bible conference! God is keeping His covenant promise to us, even though we may not have been absolutely faithful, nor mindful of His everlasting covenant to our descendants after us.

Sixth, "The covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised."

Look at verses 9-14, "9 Then God said to Abraham, “As for you, you must keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. 10 This is My covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. 11 You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between Me and you. 12 For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring. 13 Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. 14 Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.”"

This circumcision was a permanent, indelible sign cut into the very flesh of every male. This sign could not be removed or undone. But this sign was not just a matter of the flesh, circumcision is not merely outward or physical, in reality the true circumcision is circumcision of the heart. (Rom. 2:29) The true circumcision is done by God not only for us, but for our descendants after us as well, so that we could love Him with all our heart and all our soul and live. (Deut. 30:6)

True circumcision is not a matter of outward services, but truly it is a matter of the heart, a matter of the unseen things. As we recently studied the church of Ephesus worked hard, suffered much, did much, but in their hearts there was no love for God any longer, how far they had fallen! We can do many outward things and deceive others or even ourselves, but God looks and judges the heart. Ishmael's birth was not an act of faith by Abraham, he was born out of an of desperation and not trusting God till the end. When Cain and Able gave sacrifices, God looked with favor on Abel's offering, but not with Cain's offering. It was because Able made his offering from a circumcised heart, a heart of gratitude and thankfulness to God; Cain gave out of obligation and to look good and gave nothing truly valuable or meaningful. God judged each man's heart.

The true obligation or part in the covenant that God has with us is that our hearts would be circumcised. We would repent of all our inner heart matters that do not trust God; do not love God fully; acts of fear or selfishness or our own pride. Others can't always see what is truly in our hearts, but God does and He judges according to whether we have circumcised our hearts or not. And God told Abram if anyone was not circumcised, they were to be cut off. Circumcision of the heart is not an option, it is mandatory. Either we cut off, or we are ourselves are cut off.

Seventh, "Her name will be Sarah."

Both Sarai and Sarah mean "Princess". There are two kinds of Princesses. But there is a great deal of difference the two. There is the Princess who needs all the attention and others to serve her. Tell her all the time how beautiful she is and has to have everything given to her. This was Sarai. She gave up her marital bed, not so much as an act of love for Abram, not an act of faith, but because she wanted to erase her humiliation of not having a child. But it didn't work out that way. Her plan to erase her humiliation, in reality became the source for her to be despised. These kinds of Princesses never have their fill of attention or can never be fully satisfied. It's always me, me, me. I know many men who dated such women.

But then there is the second Princess, a mother of nations! A woman who gives her life in service and love that kings would come from her. 1 Peter 3:3-6, "Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way of the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear."

I thank God for giving me the most beautiful woman of faith as my wife. Her beauty, her true beauty comes from her faith in God; her quiet and gentle sprit. Interestingly, it is my wife's quiet, submissive and gentle spirit and absolute faith in God that has had the most impact on our children, for them to have faith in God, not my loud, bombastic words and rumblings. I still remember when we met our spiritual daughter, almost a decade ago. At that time she was a Princess, she sought human love and attention and affirmation. But I thank God because He is transforming her into a Princess, a mother of nations, before our very eyes. I thank God for the many mothers of nations among us! May God raise up our precious unmarried sisters to be such Princesses and not the first kind.

Eighth, the difference between being blessed and having God's covenant.

Abraham wanted his son Ishamel to be blessed and God did so, but Ishmael could never have the covenant promised to Abram and his descendants. God blesses all people on earth, He sends rain on all. He provides all men with life, and food and all things, but not all men turn to God in repentance and thanks to God. Ishamel married an Egyptian woman, his descendants were numerous and rulers would come from him, but they would constantly be in conflict with God's people. But Isaac, who means laughter, God would be his God and all people would be blessed through him, just as his father Abraham was. My son Peter and all my sons are not just to be blessed, but to be sons of the covenant. That God would be their God, and their lives would be a source of blessing to those after them.

Ninth, "On that very day".

After God finished speaking to him, God went up from him. And on that very day, Abram fully obeyed God and had himself and all the males in his household circumcised, including his son Ishmael. Now is the time to listen to God. We came to this conference to listen to God and repent. We are not to postpone or delay, but NOW is the time for us to repent and reaffirm God's covenant to each of us, to live as a Kingdom of priests and a holy people. To be salt and light in this world, to reach out to the lost and dying. To walk faithfully with our God and be blameless all the remaining days of our lives.

I thank and praise God for giving me this passage at this time in my life. As most of you know because of my life testimony I shared at this very conference site, not to very long ago. My childhood was missing one thing, family. I came from a broken home. I wanted a family. It is the one thing I've wanted my whole life. And by gods grace and mercy alone, He gave me my family. I almost wrecked it because of my sin. There have been many ups and downs and conflicts in my family, especially between my son Peter and I. For the longest time, just the every day life of raising a family and providing for them, filed up Mari and my life, and of course serving the ministry. So I really didn't get to enjoy the family God gave to me. But now my sons are older, I repented my sin of adultery completely, my relationship with my oldest son has never been better, I am having a blast with my four younger sons. I really want to this year focus on my two youngest sons, who were often lost in the mix. I love them dearly and I've been able to enjoy the family God has given me.

But this passage is calling me to see that God's blessing to me was never meant to make up for my lost childhood desire for a family. God gave me my family to be an everlasting covenant, He has been my God and He gave me my family that He would be their God also, but not just my sons, but also my spiritual daughter and all the spiritual children God gives me afterwards.

I'm fifty years old and I've wanted to now take it easy and live a blessed life enjoying my family, but Abraham was 99, when God called him to walk faithfully before God Almighty and be blameless. I can see that I need to repent my early retirement spirit, my life of faith is just beginning, I'm only half Abrahams age. I pray to go back and serve the flock of God at UCLA, the land God Almighty promised to me! I repent my laziness, and unbelief that the students would not respond to me, the distance, my tiredness, my lack of love towards Gods flock. I pray I may walk with my God faithfully and be blameless before Him all the rest of my young age, until I really become old!

One Word: I am God Almighty, walk before Me and be blameless!