

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

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. ²And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.” ³Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him,

⁴“As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. ⁵No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. ⁶I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.

⁷I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

¹⁵God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. ¹⁶I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.”

Mark 8:31-38

³¹Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³²He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

³⁴He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵For those who want to save their psyche will lose it, and those who lose their psyche for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their psyche? ³⁷Indeed, what can they give in return for their psyche?

³⁸Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

Walking with Jesus 1: God’s Love Is in the Air

Walking with Jesus 2: Seeing How Long the Road Is

We’re in the second week of our series, *Walking with Jesus*, and we’re looking at our life of discipleship as a journey along a road, a road we might call *the path of righteousness*, the road that leads to salvation. Last week I spoke of how Jesus began his ministry after he was baptized and how he had that very special experience at his baptism (describe), and I said that the certainty of God’s love and approval is like oxygen that sustains us, that feeds our body and keeps us alive as we walk down that road. Today I want to talk about the nature of the road itself. My hope is that you would see you have actually been carried for quite a long ways on that road, and that you are

also carrying others on that road, and how that road leads to the fulfillment of God's promise.

The knowledge of God's love carried Jesus through all circumstances – it empowered him to overcome Satan tempting him in the wilderness. Today, Satan reappears to Jesus in a more down-to-earth manner. This time he appears in the form of his most trusted disciple Peter. Today I will share with you the less obvious ways that we may be Jesus is again tempted to stray from the path of righteousness, and this is in a more subtle way than it occurred with Satan in the wilderness, because it comes from the mouth of a friend, someone human and close to Jesus. It's a temptation to settle for the here and the now and the my. The temptation is to make *my* self comfortable, powerful, secure in this lifetime in this location. It is, I believe, the greatest evil to befall the church in this generation is the focus on the self and our material well-being in this world, and it's vastly popular. It's what so many people want to hear – make yourself wealthy and comfortable on this earth because that's what God wants. It's an easy temptation to fall into because there's so much out there that makes us feel so good. Jesus could have been a success at anything in this world – he could catch fish at the drop of a hat. He could heal the sick, cure the blind and the lame. He could have been a lawyer; he was great at arguing issues of justice. Despite Roman rule, Jesus could have lived a comfortable life, had wife and children, and been highly respected by his community. What kept Jesus from pursuing the same kinds of dreams that we too often pursue? *Jesus' mind was not on himself!*

That's right; Jesus' mind was not on himself; it was on those who lived around him, and those who would come after him...like us! Because that is how God wants us to think, not about my individual life at this moment history. Notice the promise God makes to Abraham in our Old Testament reading; walk before me and be blameless...and I will make you exceedingly numerous – in other words, you will be fruitful, and your children will be fruitful. Perhaps our greatest desire on this planet is to leave a legacy, to make things better for those who survive us. We all have a limited time here on earth, and God's intention is that life continues after we're gone. There is great joy in seeing children and grandchildren, nieces and nephews, and when we see them making good decisions and themselves walking on the path of righteousness, we have peace in our hearts, and we see them making bad decisions and going in the wrong direction we are troubled, because we have to wonder what may happen after we're gone. We can help them while we're alive, but who will help them after we're gone? God's promise to Abraham was astoundingly prophetic, because he was making a promise to Abraham's children's children's children's children, that Abraham's righteousness would lead to other's righteousness. God made a promise to Abraham 3000 years ago, and we are proof of God's promise to him. Abraham could to his grave confident that his line would continue indefinitely...earlier God had told him that they would be more numerous than the stars in the sky, which is hard to determine; our own galaxy has about 300 billion stars, and it's estimated that there are more than 100 billion galaxies, often much bigger than our galaxy. Thanks in part to science we gain a greater appreciation of God's promise to Abraham than Abraham might have had.

It's important to remember what God's promise to Abraham was because there are many people out there who twist the word of God and in doing so have actually diminished God's promise, turning it into something just about themselves and just about their own brief lifetime on this earth. "Oh, Lord won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz; My friends all have Porches, I must make amends..." There are Christians who think of God's promise as only about their personal eternity with God, that they are going to heaven and that's all that matters. Their belief is their personal insurance policy that ensures them a condo near the golf course. And when we think of life as simply a matter of our personal pleasure and personal joy totally separated from any concern about the joy of others, totally independent of any concern for our ancestors and the world we leave to them, we have truly strayed from that path of righteousness.

It's important that we see how God wants us to think in regards to our life and our relationships here on earth, because the temptation is to think that it's all about me. And when we diminish God into a personal God that is all about making my life better, making me more prosperous, making me more comfortable, we have fallen into the very temptation that Peter articulates to Jesus: "Master, you don't need to go off and die; You're going to be king! You're going to rule from a throne in Jerusalem, and we will be your faithful (and presumably powerful and wealthy) servants. Our lives in the here and now will be splendid."

We have to remember that we are not the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham; we're just part of the process. The journey began long before we were born, and it will continue long after we're gone. Jesus understood this; his heart was with those who would live on after his death, and that's what empowered him to face death, not without fear, because he wept in that garden and asked if that cup could be taken from him, but in the end he said, "Not my will but thy will be done." Jesus died for all people, past, present and future – Peter later says that Jesus went to preach to the spirits who were in prison in order to free them from that prison, as he frees us from the prison of egocentrism – I remember when I would get so caught up in myself that I imagined that the entire world was all the creation of my own mind, then came the scarier notion that I was just a brain in a laboratory, and that "God" was controlling all my feelings and experiences; that's what happens when your ego runs amuck. I am so thankful that I am but one human being among many wonderful human beings, and that many wonderful human beings preceded me, prepared a way from me, fought for me and died for me. And now I am here, and I am charged with preparing the next generation to stay on that wonderful path.

Jesus understood where the other path would lead. Jesus understood that if he went down the path of self-glorification, of self-satisfaction, of temporal comfort and wealth, he would only be perpetuating the status quo, which was a system where might makes right, everyone is engaged in a power grab, people are afraid of one another because they fear that they'll be attacked or killed for those things that they think they own, and like will be quite miserable. Life is quite miserable for those who live in such bondage and fear. In Christ we are freed from that self-destructive cycle that leads so many of us to wonder what the future has in store. The Holy Spirit keeps us focused on others, not

on ourselves, so that we can partake of the joy of watching God's will play out now and into the future.

We're carrying the baton on one leg of a very long relay, and we cannot see the finish line from where we are, but in Christ we have the promise that we will all share in the joy of a collective glory when all things come to fruition. Jesus has won. Evil is defeated, not yet in this world but in the lives of his people.