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# Light On Our Path



*Messages by Pastor Paul Aasman  
on the book of Genesis  
at the Streetlight Mission Church  
in the 11:00 a.m. services of September 2007*

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September 2, 2007  
Pastor Paul Aasman

**Genesis 17:11** “You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.”

### *The Covenant of God - Circumcision*

Reading: Genesis 17:9-27  
Text: Genesis 17:11

Sometimes when we read the Bible, you might get the idea that these are really old stories. You might even wonder to yourself: Why are we paying so much attention to them? We read here about Abraham – he must have been born 4000 years ago – in about BC 2000. He’s an old man with an old wife and no children between the two of them. And they are still holding on to old promises from Yahweh. And now we read about an ancient ritual God commanded them to practice, something that we no longer practice – circumcision. Why are we so preoccupied with this old stuff?

The answer is simple: because what is old in the Bible became new in Jesus Christ. Jesus came to fulfill all that is written in the OT. He once told the Jews of his time, “The scriptures, they testify concerning me.” Jesus came clothed in the garment of scriptures.

It is not hard to see how Jesus makes our chapter come alive!

Our passage begins with God commanding Abraham, “As for you, you must keep my covenant” (vs. 9). So what is the covenant? It is the agreement that God made with Abraham. The heart of the covenant is God’s promise to be Abraham’s God. God gave himself to him so that he might always be there to take care of him and to make sure that his promise to give land and children might come true.

But God added something to the promise: the ceremony of circumcision. In verse 11 God called it a sign of the covenant. In other places, God called it a seal of the covenant. Do you know what a seal is? They are not so common anymore, but they do still exist. If you went to college, did all the work and earned yourself a diploma, then you would get a piece of paper declaring that you have in fact earned this diploma; it would have signatures of important people who tell you that it is true, and it might even have a blob of wax with an impression pressed into it to guarantee that it is authentic.

Well, that is sort of what circumcision was meant to be for Abraham. It was a sign or a seal that guaranteed that God meant what he said. God’s promise is official. He will never go back on his word. And what is more, the promises were guaranteed to the person who received the sign.

So what exactly was the sign? Well, it might make me a little uncomfortable talking about it, but circumcision means that

the foreskin gets cut off. Every male in Abraham's household had to get circumcised, and after that, whenever a boy was born and turned 8 days old, he also had to be circumcised.

Why did God want to do that? Well, it represented two things. First of all, when the ring of skin was cut off, the person would bleed for a while. That pointed to the blood of the covenant – before you could enter the covenant, blood had to be shed because nobody deserved to receive God's beautiful promises. Somebody would have to die to earn God's promise. The shedding of blood would be a regular reminder of this fact.

The second thing which the cutting off of the foreskin taught was that each person needed to cut something away in order to enter into covenant with God. Something had to be removed. The prophets often told the people that they needed to remove the foreskin of their heart. Can you imagine what that means? It means that people need to get rid of their sinful ways, evil attitudes and wicked nature. Paul tells us very clearly that to be circumcised means to cut off the sinful nature in Col 2:11 – *“In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ...”*

So, in order to enter into covenant with God, somebody needs to die, and the person needs to change.

Now you might still be wondering: Well, what does that have to do with us?

It has everything to do with us. Who do you think died so that we might receive God's promises? Jesus Christ. His blood was shed. Every circumcision pointed to shedding of the blood of Jesus Christ. So after Jesus shed his blood and died, and thus won for us the right to receive the promises of God, does it make sense that children still be circumcised? That they should shed their blood before entering into covenant with God? No, it does not. That would be like saying that Jesus had not died already for us and took away our sins. But he has, so circumcision can no longer be the rite by which we enter into covenant with God.

That is why the Apostle Paul says that in Jesus Christ, circumcision has changed into baptism. Paul calls baptism “the circumcision of Christ” in Col 2:12 – *“...having been buried with him (Christ) in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.”* When we are baptised, we enter into covenant with God for Jesus' sake. The Lord Jesus has won for us the right to have a relationship with God. For Jesus' sake, God is not just our God, but our Father! We are richer for Jesus' sake.

But Jesus has changed the rite in another way too. No longer is the change we must experience taught by cutting a piece of the flesh away, but now it is taught by washing with water. We

still need to change, but cutting does not change us; washing changes us. Before we can enter into God's family, we need to wash. That now is what happens when we are baptized - God promises to wash you with the blood and Spirit of Jesus - he promises that he will change you by his power and grace so that you live as his child.

So what happened to Abraham in this passage is not just old, dusty history. It is alive and very meaningful to us all for our daily lives. Not all of us have been baptised. If you have been, then you can count on that sign and seal that has been pressed onto your heart through baptism – God really has given himself to you. If you have not been baptised yet, then be assured of this: God promises you right now to be your God and Father for Jesus' sake; he promises to renew your heart. But earnestly long for the day when you might be baptised into the name of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, so that God's promise might be personally sealed upon your heart.

September 9, 2007  
Pastor Paul Aasman

**Genesis 19:26** “But Lot's wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.”

***Don't Look Back***

Reading: Genesis 19:1-29  
Text: Genesis 19:26

Augustine once said: If you can't draw people into the church with promises, then drive them in – with whips if necessary. He taught this in connection with the words Jesus once spoke: “Compel them to come in.” The unfortunate result of Augustine's idea is that the church did try to force people into the church. There was a time when people were imprisoned, tortured, fined, persecuted and even killed for not accepting everything that the church taught.

That, of course, is wrong. No one ever became a Christian by force. But God does use both promises and threats. With God there are fabulous blessings, but there are also terrifying curses, and in the end, each one of us will get either the one thing or the other. Though the church may not force people to believe in God, it must be able not only to speak about the beautiful promises of God's love, but also about the threats of his wrath.

This story of Genesis 19 is about both the tenderness of God's love and the violence of his wrath. The story begins in the

previous chapter. God revealed to Abraham that he was going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because the wickedness of those cities was so terrible. Abraham knew that Lot lived there, so he begged God to spare the cities. In the end, God agreed with Abraham that if there were only ten righteous people in the city of Sodom, he would spare the city.

But God could not find even ten righteous people. The arrival of the angels in Sodom, appearing as travellers, confirmed it. They came and stayed the night with Lot, because Lot was generous and hospitable. After the sun set, we read in vs 4 that all the men from every part of the city from old to young - they all descended on Lot's house.

What did they want?

They wanted something so wicked that it is too terrible to think much about it. God's precious and holy gift of sexuality had become for these people a pounding passion that needed to be satisfied, no matter how much pain and injury it caused. The city of Sodom had no righteous person left, except Lot and his family. Sodom's sin was complete, and there was only one thing left to do: destroy it.

So the angel told Lot in vs. 12-13: *"Do you have anyone else here - sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out of here, because we are*

*going to destroy this place. The outcry to the LORD against its people is so great that he has sent us to destroy it."*

The sons-in-law were not righteous, but if they wanted to join Lot and be spared, here was their chance. Not everyone gets a direct invitation from God to escape his wrath. But it made no difference, they only laughed. They could no longer imagine that there was a just God who took morality seriously. Their homosexuality was not a sin. *We were born this way. Why not enjoy it?* They thought Lot was telling a joke. *There's nothing wrong with what we're doing.*

The whole night passed, and still Lot had not fled the city. Finally in vs. 15 we read *"With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, 'Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished.'"*

And still, Lot resisted.

Sometimes, God must take you by the hand and give you a shake, to wake you up: Now, today, you need to do this! You need to make a change in your life; you need to get rid of a pattern. If you don't you will be destroyed!

Those who escape do so because of God's grace – because those whom Christ has purchased with his precious blood God will seize by the hand and lead them out, as he did Lot. That is what he does with those whom he loves, and he loves you who believe.

We are rarely moved by threats, we are so spiritually lazy. We need to be led by the power of God's love. And that is what he is doing to you today: he instructs us from his word and then he takes us by the hand by the power of the Holy Spirit to bring us where we never expected, to a new life we never thought possible.

The angel led Lot to the edge of town: "Flee! Don't look back!" Look ahead. The past is not important. Look ahead to the promises God gives. Don't think about what unbelievers are thinking about all the time: money, pleasure, serving yourself. Where is your treasure? In heaven or on earth? "*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*" (Matt. 6:21)

Lot, his wife, and their two daughters fled. But Lot's wife's treasure was not ahead. It was in the city, even though it was under God's wrath. Fire came down from heaven. The land was filled with oil, tar sands and hardened - natural asphalt. Suddenly, the whole land was on fire, and the city too. The trees and animals were all destroyed and every last person too. God's judgment on Sodom was so dreadful that the region remains a wasteland even today - no animals, creatures or vegetation.

Lot's wife stopped as they fled. She turned around, though the angel warned her not to. She turned her back on God's promises for the future. That was not where her treasure was. Her treasure was in the city, even though it was under God's judgment. She did not go forward into God's future. She perished where she

stood - perhaps the poisonous vapour of the inferno with which the land still reeks today, overcame her. The salty air, dense with sulphur because of God's judgement, condensed on her body and encased it in a salt-like crust. Before long, she turned into a pillar of salt.

Hear God's warning and tremble. God is serious about his threats against those who disobey him. But also listen to the promises of God's love. It is with acts of love that he will draw you out of danger into the security of his grace, to lead you forward to a future filled with hope.

September 16, 2007  
*Pastor Paul Aasman*

**Genesis 21:6** "Sarah said, 'God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.'"

### ***God Gives Laughter***

Reading: Genesis 21:1-7  
Text: Genesis 21:6

A child is born. His name is laughter, or 'he laughs.' An old man and woman laugh with the kind of emotion they may never quite have experienced before. They are stirred deeply in their spirits. Our passage is all about laughter.

There are many kinds of laughter. There is the bitter kind of laughter, a laugh of unbelief. We heard about that last week when Lot told his sons-in-law to flee the city of Sodom because God was so angry with the city that he was going to destroy it. They laughed at Lot; they thought he was joking. They could not believe that God would destroy the city – it seemed impossible. Bitter laughter, of unbelief, of mockery, contempt. It's the kind of laughter of a person who makes fun because you are different. Such laughter, however, only makes a person feel worse. There is no joy, only bitterness and hatred.

Then there is the laughter you feel when you watch a comedy on TV. It makes you feel almost happy for a moment, but when the show is over, there is usually nothing of it left. Empty happiness.

But then there is the kind of laughter that is so rich it can make you cry. Perhaps you have been surprised by something you've wanted for a long time (the conversion of a friend), or a long process has come to a beautiful completion (mothers often cry at a child's wedding). It is a good emotion that remains in you for a long time to comfort and encourage you.

Sarah and Abraham had felt the bitter kind of laughter of all things, against God. When God had promised to give them a son, they laughed. First Abraham laughed in Genesis 17:17: *“Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, ‘Will a*

*son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?’”* And then Sarah laughed in Genesis 18:12: *“So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, ‘After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?’”* They were bitter in spirit about God's promises. They hardly believed in them any more.

But then God said to Sarah in Genesis 18:14: *“Is anything too hard for the LORD?”* If he says it, will he not do it? Perhaps you wonder if God can do the things that the Bible talks about: bring us into a world without pain, disease, fear or death; a place where there is only healing, deeply meaningful days, delightful surprises at God's love and majesty each day.

God promises it. He promises it especially to you. To those who feel depressed, discouraged, and even hopeless, to those who see nothing but darkness, unhappiness, anger, and pain in the future - God addresses this passage to you today, and this message. God will wipe away every tear from your eye. It is because you cry that God's promise is so important.

Here at last is the child God had so long ago promised Abraham and Sarah. He is not born in the normal way. Paul points that out in Galatians 4:23: *“His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise.”* He is a child born by the promise. A child born in the normal way is exciting enough. A child born by a

promise is 100 times better still, because such a child cannot be born, yet God does it. The child born by a promise is you and I - it is being born again by the Spirit of God, it is being born not by human effort or a man's desire, but born of God - born by God's promise.

God's promise to you is that if you believe in Jesus Christ, you will not perish but have everlasting life. Believe in God's love for Jesus' sake. Be to the church what Isaac was to Abraham and Sarah. Be a child of Abraham, a child of grace. Be that person who gives us great joy - deep, lasting wonderful joy that brings tears of happiness to our eyes – not only to us, but also to the angels and your Father in heaven. For we, the Church, shall rejoice at the proof of your faith which shows that you are, like Isaac, a child of promise.

September 30, 2007  
*Pastor Paul Aasman*

**Genesis 23:3** “Then Abraham rose from beside his dead wife and spoke to the Hittites.”

### ***The Death of Sarah***

Reading: Genesis 23  
Text: Genesis 23:3

How old was Sarah when Isaac was born? 90 years. How old was Sarah when she died? 127 years. So how many years did

she have with Isaac? Yes, Isaac had given nearly 40 years of laughter to Sarah. She had suffered much as she waited years and years for a child to be born, but then she had more years of joy when God gave what he had promised her. Her joy in Isaac was that much greater because she waited so long for him. Isaac - a fitting name indeed. Do you remember what it means? It means 'laughter'.

Sarah died a contented woman. That is something beautiful. She did not die in a bitter spirit, but in the quiet joy of having received what she longed for in this world. It enabled her to be even more certain of receiving from God yet better things in the world to come.

Verse 2 carefully tells us where she was buried. If your mother has died, I'm sure you know the exact place where she is buried. I've even travelled with one of you as you gladly showed me the place: “Here she is, Pastor Paul. This is where my mother was buried.” It is important to us. When important religious figures die, their followers raise up a shrine over their grave - singers, actors, politicians, prophets etc. So this is where Sarah was buried: in Hebron, or as it was formerly known, Kiriath Arba.

Abraham went to Sarah to mourn for her. Though she died a contented woman, Abraham was very sad. Death is always an enemy. Jesus Christ has triumphed over it, but it still has power. I hate death, even if there are better things beyond it. Death has

taken my mother and father away from me, and friends. It has taken people from you too! You may grieve its power. Abraham did.

Now, the death of a loved one can so hurt the living that they just want to give up on life. They only want to be near the body. They want to forget everything else and just mourn. Abraham might have been inclined that way too. But he could not. The business of living does not allow us to loose ourselves in the death of those we love. Abraham could not leave Sarah unburied. He had to put her body in the ground. In fact, in those days and in that warm climate, it was common to bury the dead on the very day that they died. So Abraham could not just mourn.

So we read in verse 3, "*Abraham rose from beside his dead wife and spoke to the Hittites*". And the rest of the chapter describes the business of the living, conducted for the dead. According to the customs of the time, Abraham and Ephron bargained for a piece of land so that he might bury his wife there. Abraham originally only wanted a part of the field, but Ephron wanted him to purchase the whole field. Abraham needed the field immediately and Ephron knew that. So he pressed his advantage and proposed a price that was much higher than its value - 400 shekels of silver (cf Jeremiah 32:9). Abraham was distracted from his grief by the business of life. He had many duties yet.

Abraham agreed to the price. It was worth it. Sarah must be buried here, in the land God was giving to the family, for the land of Canaan, the land God was giving to his people, was not the land of the dead, but the land for the living. He speaks to Ephron about 'my dead'. Sarah is still his, even if she is dead. For you see, Abraham knows that she is not really dead, because El Shaddai is not the God of the dead, but of the living. Sarah's body is like a seed which he will plant in the ground so that it might rise again - sown perishable, raised imperishable; sown in dishonour but raised in glory; sown in weakness but raised in power; sown a natural body but raised a spiritual body.

Sarah must be in the land God has promised. And when Abraham dies, he must be there too (see 25:9). Abraham believed that God was the God of the living, not of the dead. He believed in the resurrection of the body and life in the Promised Land forever. He believed, though he did not know Jesus Christ.

Jesus has come and he has broken the power of death. He has triumphed over it. He has risen by his own power and he promises that he will give us the same victory. Death is still an enemy, but it will soon be utterly destroyed. Death shall be swallowed up in victory. And then at last Sarah and Abraham will embrace again in the flesh; all those who die in faith will be restored to one another in perfection.

Abraham gives clear evidence of this faith when he rose up from Sarah's side to arrange her burial in the Promised Land. Let us be sure that we do not get hung up over the death of loved ones. Let us embrace the business of life, because our God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. And we, even if we die, shall yet live. Believe in God's power to overcome death, and serve him with your life.