Cling to that priceless pearl who is Jesus Christ

*“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.”*

 Matthew 13:45-46

From a worldly perspective, we might think the merchant to be a fool. He has the pearl that is so valuable, but nothing else. He has sold his home and has nowhere to live. His money is all gone, so he has nothing with which to buy food. He has no other possessions for his comfort: only this single pearl. And clinging to this pearl, he will pass away from starvation or exposure. In death, the pearl will remain, but it will not be his. He has gained nothing.

But, as usual, Jesus turns the wisdom of the world on its head. The Kingdom of heaven is worth whatever it costs to obtain it. Citizenship to the Kingdom is the free gift of God through Jesus Christ. However, we must hold onto it at all costs. Even if we must give up all we own, even if we must lose all our wealth, even if it costs us our lives, we must hold to the Kingdom through Christ.

When we spend our all, even our very lives for the Kingdom, then we gain all. Whatever we sacrifice for the Kingdom will be given back a hundred fold. In God’s Kingdom, the more we give away for its sake, the more we have.

As our Lord said, “*For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?*” We may not be required to give all we have to hold onto the Kingdom; but we must be always ready to do so. It turns out that the fool is the one who holds onto what he can’t keep.

In Christ’s love

John

 10-9-22

Genesis 15:17-18

Almighty God called Abram away from his homeland and away from his extended family, to come to a place that he did not know. A place where he would be a foreigner. Most importantly, Abram was called away from paganism to become a follower of the one true God. In calling Abram to Himself, God made some promises to him. Among them, He promised Abram that he would have descendants; and that these descendants would have the land that Abram now resided in.

Abram believed God even though, humanly speaking, these promises were impossible. Abram and his wife, Sarai, were past the age to be having children. Also, the land was already inhabited by several other peoples.

Now, God had made promises to Abram and Abram believed Him. God had even repeated the promises a couple times. We all know that God’s word is sufficient; He does not lie and never fails to bring about what He has said. But we are weak human-beings, so in His grace, God will give us the encouragement we need to persevere. And that’s what chapter 15 is about: God giving Abram something he can hold on to. And in the process, giving us encouragement also.

Abram had asked God about descendants, since he had not been blessed with children. God told him specifically that an offspring would come from his own body; he would have a child. Then God had him go outside to look at all the stars of the sky to see how many descendants he would have. God’s specific wording and the majestic visual provided by the night sky (which God had created) would have strengthened Abram’s conviction that what God told him was going to happen.

Abram had a second question. He accepted what God said about children, but how would he know that he would actually possess the land? He believed God, but he struggled to understand. So, God made a covenant with Abram.

Although God’s promises are completely reliable, He graciously condescends to make covenants with us. Covenants have something tangible associated with them. In our day it is usually in the form of a contract. Covenants spell out the duties of each person involved and at least imply the consequences of not following through on one’s part of the bargain.

People make covenants between themselves all the time, but the most beautiful covenant between people was set up by God Himself in the Garden of Eden: it is the marriage covenant. God established the marriage covenant to be between a man and a woman and it was to last for their lifetime. This covenant formed the foundation for the stable family unit and then for stable society. More importantly, it is a picture of the relationship between Christ and His church.

God uses covenants. We say that He is a covenant making God; and it goes without saying that He is a covenant keeping God. In 2 Timothy 2:13 Paul says, “*If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.*” It is because of God’s unchanging nature that He is always faithful in everything; so, He is faithful in His covenants. It is awesome that God will make covenants with us, His creation. He is God, He doesn’t have to do that. By our very nature we will break those covenants and be unfaithful. But that is how great and merciful and kind our God is. He will enter into agreement with His sinful creation for our benefit. It is only right that He would be glorified in so doing.

Covenants between God and man are something God initiates. He has the wisdom and foresight to create them properly so they will bring about the desired results. Even when we fail to uphold our end, God’s desires are still established. God has already brought about several covenants here in Genesis.

Covenants involve the terms of the agreement, blood, and a sign. Most notable so far in Genesis is the covenant with Noah. Blood was shed in the sacrifices Noah offered in thanksgiving for their deliverance from the flood and God gave the sign of the rainbow. God promised that He would never again destroy the earth with water. But there were also stipulations given about eating meat and the murder of human-beings.

We are very familiar with the covenant made through Moses. There were a tremendous number of regulations given for the people to follow and God would bestow blessings and curses accordingly. The blood involved was the numerous sacrifices offered through the priests descended from Aaron. The sign of this covenant was the weekly Sabbath as observed in the Old Testament.

The most important covenant for us in the Bible is called the New Covenant. The New Covenant is prophesied specifically in Jerimiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 16:60-62. The prophecy of Jeremiah says, in part, *“Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah”; “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”; “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”*

We know this covenant is the one brought about through Jesus Christ. His own blood establishes this covenant; and the sign is that we are sealed by the Holy Spirit. Our part in this covenant is to believe on Jesus Christ as our one and only Saviour. Our belief, held in faith, does not depend on works; but works accompany our faith as evidence. On His part, Jesus suffered the consequences of our sins which fulfilled the justice God requires.

This is the only covenant for us as Christians. It is the only one by which we can be saved. However, we do not discard the other covenants. They show us what is pleasing to God and reveal His will for our daily lives. They point to Jesus and the redemption He provides as the seed of the woman; The redemption God had ready from before the beginning of time.

Now, back to Abram and the beginning of what is known as the Abrahamic Covenant. In response to Abram’s question about how he might know that he would possess the land, God told him to get certain animals. This is something Abram recognized as preparing for a covenant ceremony. He got the animals and cut the large ones in half and lay the halves opposite each other. The idea of the ceremony was that those who were making the agreement would walk between the halves. This would signify that what happened to the animals is what would happen to them if they didn’t uphold their part of the agreement. This is pretty graphic but it left an impression on whoever took part.

What Abram saw was a smoking oven and a flaming torch pass between the pieces. Often we see smoke and fire being associated with God and with His presence. Abram saw a theophany; an appearance of God symbolized by the smoke and fire. God Himself walked between the animal halves, committing Himself to the covenant, and stating the area of land belonged to Abram’s descendants. Notice the past tense in verse 18, “*I have given this land*.” God is outside of time so what He knows has already happened may not have appeared to us yet. This wording is also a strong assurance that the promise is sure.

One of the amazing things here is that Abram did not walk between the pieces. God took on the full responsibilities of this covenant. Abram was going to have descendants and they were going to have the land regardless of what any of them did or didn’t do. This would include the promise to bless those who blessed his descendants and curse those who cursed them. And certainly, that all the nations would be blessed through him.

It is a blessing for us to be able to look and see how God has kept this covenant. Abram’s physical descendants are innumerable; as are his spiritual descendants through Jesus Christ. The nation of Israel did come into possession of this land. During the monarchies of David and Solomon, the boarders did reach from the Euphrates to Egypt.

Now, the promise was not filled entirely because Israel did not drive out all the inhabitants like they were supposed to. So there were sections of the land that were held by Canaanites. But God’s promise is still in effect: the books of Ezekiel and Revelation let us know that during the millennial reign of Christ and in the new earth, all that land will belong to Israel. And Abram will be there.

We can see throughout history that enemies of Israel have not faired well, while their allies have been blessed. And, of course, all the nations have been blessed in the descendant of Abraham, Jesus.

This is an interesting covenant in that it wasn’t completely established in that moment. There were other factors involved and the covenant evolved over time. Let’s consider the blood required for the covenant. Obviously, the blood of the animals that were cut in pieces and killed provided the necessary blood. But there are two other occurrences that provided the blood.

Remember that this took place right after Abram returned from rescuing Lot and he met with the king of Salam, Melchizedek. Melchizedek shared with Abram a meal of bread and wine. The wine would have been symbolic of the blood of Jesus, just as our Lord’s Supper is. Jesus, and the shedding of His blood, is part of the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abram: that all the nations would be blessed in him. Through the offering of Melchizedek, the Abrahamic covenant is tied to the New Covenant that we enjoy through Jesus.

The other occurrence that provides blood for this covenant takes place later in Genesis. We will study it in more detail when we come to it, but we are all familiar with Abram offering his son Isaac as a sacrifice. Abram was obedient to God in being willing to sacrifice Isaac, but at the last moment, God intervened and Isaac was spared. God provided a ram for a sacrifice in his place. This scene shows us the coming sacrifice of Jesus, but again, Christ’s blood is associated with the Abrahamic covenant.

The Abrahamic covenant is closely tied to the New Covenant in Jesus. There are many parallels between them. One is the idea of promised land. Abram is promised the physical land of the Canaanites which God guarantees through the blood of the animals. We await a spiritual promised land which God guarantees through the blood of Christ.

The sign of this covenant doesn’t show up until later and it is the sign of circumcision. For men, to be physically circumcised was necessary to be a Jew; it was a requirement from God in order to be brought into the Abrahamic covenant. While the sign for the New Covenant is to be sealed by the Holy Spirit, both men and women are spiritually circumcised in their hearts. When we receive Christ as Saviour, our hearts are changed and made new; God removes our hearts of stone and gives us a heart of flesh. We are spiritually born again.

God had revealed to Abram that his descendants would be slaves for 400 years before they came to the land of Canaan to possess it. He also told him that he would go to his fathers at a good old age. So, Abram would have understood that the promise of the physical land was for his descendants and that he was heading for a spiritual promised land, heaven. This is the same promised land we are seeking through Jesus.

As the Abrahamic covenant progressed, the Lord sought obedience and faith from Abram and all those associated with him. The Lord still seeks obedience and faith from us today. We do our best, but, like Abram, we still fail to keep our end of the covenant. So, in effect, Abram, and all of us, deserve the fate of the animals that were gruesomely sacrificed for the Abrahamic covenant.

But God, who walked between the pieces, and has faithfully and flawlessly held up His part of the covenant, has suffered the fate of the animals. In Jesus, He suffered the penalty for violating the covenant; He took the curse implied in the agreement. He took the curses of the old covenants in order to establish the New.

In Jesus, the seed of the woman, we are offered redemption. We have been offered a way to the Father that doesn’t depend on us; it depends on the perfect Son of God. Accepting Jesus as our Saviour is the one thing we must do; and even that is done by faith given to us by the Holy Spirit. That is now the only acceptable covenant; the only pathway to the Promised Land. Confessing Jesus is our only hope.

Prayer

Merciful Lord God, how amazing it is to look back through Your history, and see how You brought about our chance for redemption. The more we see the more we know that we can claim no part in our salvation. You deserve all the praise and glory for bringing us into Your Promised Land. You deserve our eternal gratitude.

We ask that by the strength of Your Holy Spirit, we faithfully serve You during our life on earth. Help us that we may be at work when our Master returns. May all the blessing You pour out upon us be turned back to You in praise, and be used to increase Your Kingdom.

Sanctify us Lord, during our time on earth. Make us fit for Your heavenly dwelling. Shape us into the proper spiritual stones we need to be for the building of the heavenly temple; to be Your dwelling place. As our bodies are now a temple of the Holy Spirit, please guide us so that we do not grieve Him; circumcise our hearts so that we do not resist Him.

We thank You for these things in Jesus’ name

Amen