

Life Group Notes
Sunday 04 February 2018

Speaker: Richard Walker
Series: Confident Adventures
Title: Remembering
Passages: Genesis 17

Because we can read Abraham's story in about 25 minutes, it's easy to miss the weight of the 25-year wait he had to see the promises of God fulfilled to him. Abraham's faith was best expressed through patience. When you are waiting for something you need to remember why you are doing it otherwise you will lose heart and wander off.

In the Bible remembering isn't merely the factual recall of trivia like sporting results, it has a moral quality, such as when parking your car on a hill, you must remember to apply the handbrake. Forgetting to do so could have disastrous consequences. If we don't make it a priority to remember who God is and what he has asked of us, then we will not only harm ourselves, but spread chaos and destruction in the world as well.

The context of Genesis 17 is God restoring Abram after a "fall." Similarly to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3, God seemed not to be acting on his promise to give Abram and Sarai a son, so they took matters into their own hands and got a son (an heir) for Abram via Sarai's slave woman.

By the time Genesis 17 happens, we're 13 years on. Ishmael, the son born to Abram via the slave woman is hitting puberty, and therefore manhood and starting to take his place as Abram's heir apparent. But God turns up and says NO! Abram will have a son via Sarai. Initially, Abram doesn't want to accept this word from God (not least because it means having to have a really awkward conversation with Ishmael). He wants Ishmael to be accepted by God and doesn't want to have to start all over again after waiting 24 years to get to this point!

God promises to bless Ishmael. In his mercy, he won't let Ishmael take the hit for the mistakes of his father and his mother's mistress, but neither will he let Abram and Sarai's mistake dictate the course of salvation history – he will do things as he planned them.

To help remind them of his promise, he gives them new names – Abraham and Sarah, a new instruction: Walk before me blamelessly and a new initiation – circumcision. Circumcision was a "sign" which reminded them of God's promise to Eve (that she would bring forth a son/a "seed") and also pointed forward to the coming of that seed – the Christ. The cutting away of the foreskin was also symbolic of God's refusal to allow the potency of man specifically, and the human race generally, to do God's work for him. We cannot save ourselves, only a miracle of God can do it.

To his credit, Abraham doesn't sulk under a tree when he realizes God is yanking him back onto the right track, rather he immediately obeys and does what God has said.

Today, we are not circumcised, because the promised coming of the "seed" (Gen 3:15) has been fulfilled in Christ. Our sign of being God's covenant people is baptism. Just as what happened to Abraham (circumcision) had to happen to his household, so too, what happened to Christ has to happen to us otherwise we do not belong to him. If we believe in Christ we must be baptized in water and the Spirit like he was (Matt.3). Baptism is symbolic of a past "dying" to our old way of life in rebellion to God and being raised up to live for God by the power of the Spirit. It's also a reminder that one day, when Christ comes again, he will raise us from the dead, the work of the Spirit will be perfected in us and we will live with God forever in the new creation.

To that end, we must cultivate regular, routine remembrance of God, for this gives life our souls.

- **Confession:** declaring to our hearts and to God who God is and who we are as a result of all his goodness to us. **Thanksgiving and praise:** the things that should flow from confession.
- **Bible reading:** this is the main and plain, bread and butter way God speaks to us. **Fasting:** humbling ourselves, emptying ourselves and recognizing that all our power to do what pleases God comes from him, not us. **Prayer:** talking to God, reflecting all that we are learning from what he tells us.

- **Simplicity:** renouncing the lie, that the joy of our life comes from the glitzy abundance of possessions, accolades and entertainment and embracing a kind of **Celebration** that takes the greatest joy from seeing God do amazing and deep things in the hearts of people – including us.
- **Solitude:** being one to one with God and shutting out the clamour of both the outside world and our anxious hearts so that we can be with him and **Gathering** with the people of God so that they can help keep us on the straight and narrow path, as well as encourage us to keep going on it when times are tough.
- **Serving one another:** sharing the load of all that God has asked us to do so that no one person or group of people burn out and... **Being served.** Ordinarily, we all love being served, except when being served means we must admit weakness. At times like these, it is hard for us to accept help, but don't let pride rob you of an opportunity to receive God's grace in this form.

As we do these things regularly, little by little, we will build a massive reservoir of testimony and legacy that will be remembered before the throne of God, with praise, forever.

Suggested questions:

- *What is the thing you have had to wait longest on God for? Are you still waiting for it? Would you have the patience to wait 25 years for God to fulfil a promise to you like Abraham and Sarah did?*
- *When we have invested much time, money and effort into something and God says no to it, it is a hard word to receive. Has this ever happened to you, what was it and how did you respond – with obedience or denial? Or are you going through it now? God is asking you to revoke a mistake you have invested in for years, and you are finding it hard to renounce. What help do you need to go God's way?*
- *Have you been baptized in water and the Spirit, if not what is stopping you from obeying God's command on this and following in the footsteps of the Master?*
- *Of the "rituals of remembrance" that give life to the soul which ones do you find easy, which ones do you find hard? What's the next step you need to take in order to allow God to breathe life into your soul? How can we help each other cultivate these?*