

6. COVENANT, Pt 2

(Genesis 15)

Do you remember the six parts of the biblical story?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

We have discussed the first two parts of the story of the Bible, and started discussing the third:

1. _____, where God makes the universe and fills and organizes it (Genesis 1 - 2).
2. _____, where human rebellion brings corruption into God's good creation (Genesis 3).
3. _____, where God enters into relationships with people, imperfect but faithful, who will be his agents and participate in his redemptive work in the world (Genesis 12).

These parts of the story give us a foundation for answering several of the "big questions":

1. In Genesis 1 - 2, the stories of creation:
 - a. **What is God like?**
 - b. **Who are we?** (What are WE like? What does it mean to be human?)
 - c. **Where are we?** (What is the world around us like?)
2. In Genesis 3 - 11, stories about Adam & Eve's sin and the consequences:
 - a. **What is the problem?** (Why is the world not the way it is supposed to be?)
3. In Genesis 12 and following, the stories about Abraham and his family:
 - a. **What is the solution?** (How is God going to fix what is wrong with the world?)

We noticed how God fills different roles in the different parts of the story:

1. **In Genesis 1 - 2, God is creator, king, provider.** He shows these things by the way he organizes creation and provides for it.
2. **In Genesis 3 - 11, God is king and judge.** We see these parts of his character through the way he enforces the commands he has given, and punishes those who break them.
3. **Also in Genesis 3 and everything that follows, God is the redeemer.** Even as he punishes those who sin against him, God always seems to be looking for a way to redeem the sinners.

Last week, we began discussing the covenant God makes with Abraham.

- Covenants are like contracts.
 - Both involve an agreement between at least two people.
 - Both deal with what each party will do for the other.
- Covenants are different from contracts.
 - Contracts focus on what the two people or groups will exchange, and the exchange is an even exchange. The people do not need to have any relationship outside the exchange.
 - Covenants focus on the relationship between the two people or groups. The exchange might be important, but the relationship is central.
- Other special features of covenants:
 - The people (or groups) in covenants are not equal to each other.
 - One is usually more powerful than the other.
 - The more powerful person initiates the contract.
 - Because the people are not equals, the exchange is always disproportionate. What the more powerful person can do for the less powerful person is always of greater value/worth than what the less powerful person can do in return.

Here is a chart that summarizes the differences:

| | Contracts | Covenants |
|----------------------------|---|--|
| Where is the focus? | Exchange of items of equal value, <i>quid pro quo</i> . | The relationship between people or groups |
| What object is exchanged? | The parties are exchanging <i>stuff</i> . | The parties are exchanging themselves. They belong to or become part of each other. |
| What is the proper result? | Parties get what they deserve and deserves what they get. | Parties show & receive mercy, grace, mutual commitment, because they belong to each other. |

Last week, we did not discuss the universal scope of God’s plan. In other words: God’s isn’t only blessing Abraham and his heirs, God wants to bless the whole world through Abraham.

- Adam & Eve are not the parents of the Jews, they are the parents of everyone.
- Abraham is the father of the Jews, but God wants to bless the whole earth through him (Gen 12.3, “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”)

- What is the ultimate fulfillment of this promise?

Here is Abraham's story after the covenant promise of Genesis 12.1-3:

- "So Abram left as the Lord had told him." (12.4)
 - Famine; Abraham and his family in Egypt; "Say you are my sister." (12.10-20)
 - Why is Abraham afraid?
 - Abraham and Lot, his nephew (13 - 14)
 - Why is Abraham attached to Lot?
-

In Genesis 15, God renews his covenant with Abraham.

Genesis 15.1-10:

- In 15.8, what is Abraham asking God for?

- Notice how God responds to Abraham's doubts; is God angry?

We have a strange ceremony here where God tells Abraham to bring out animals, and Abraham cuts them in half and arranges the parts with a pathway between the halves. This is an ancient Middle-Eastern covenant ceremony.

- What would the parties normally do in this ceremony?

- What was the point of this ritual?

- What does Abraham expect to happen?

- What happens instead? Why is this unexpected ending important? (What is God saying to Abraham?)

Abraham's story continues after this covenant ceremony.

- Sarah, Hagar, and Ishmael (Genesis 16)
 - How are Abraham and Sarah here just like Adam and Eve in Genesis 3?

- Circumcision (Genesis 17)
- Sodom and Gomorrah, end of Lot's story (Genesis 18 - 19)
- Abraham and Abimelech; "Say you're my sister." (Genesis 20)
 - Why is Abraham STILL afraid?

 - Again, how is this like Adam and Eve in Genesis 3?

 - Even after his great experiences with God, Abraham STILL fails God. Does God ever quit blessing or taking care of Abraham?

- Isaac is born; Hagar and Ishmael sent away (Genesis 21, etc.)
 - Both Lot and Ishmael must be sent away so that Isaac can be the child of the promise.

- God tests Abraham. (Genesis 22)
- Sarah dies, Abraham buys a grave, Abraham dies (Genesis 23, 25)
 - What land does Abraham own when he dies?

 - How do we rectify this with God's promise of Genesis 12, to give Abraham land for him and his family?

- What does Abraham's story teach you about your relationship with God?
- What would your Christianity be like if your relationship with God was a contract?
- Why is it important that your relationship with God is a covenant, NOT a contract?