

## Sermon: Genesis 17:1-27. "God Almighty"

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Sermon text and audio available for download at [www.waitara.anglican.asn.au](http://www.waitara.anglican.asn.au)

### Hi, my name is...!

- How do you introduce yourself to people? Let's have a go! Hi my name's \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm \_\_\_\_\_

Now listen to how God introduces himself when he meets Abraham face to face: Genesis 17:1

- *"I am God Almighty. Walk before me and be blameless."*

That's a line that would not really work for anyone else! This is God saying: This is who I am and this is who you are! I am God Almighty, and YOU walk before me – follow me and be blameless. It's a fairly frightening way to meet God isn't it? But this is God establishing his relationship with Abraham. This is who I am, this is who you are, and then he says: these are the terms of our relationship:

### The Covenant

And God confirms his covenant – his relationship – with Abraham in chapter 17.

A covenant is basically a relationship contract. Like marriage. Marriage is a two way covenant between two people. But God's covenant is different because it's one way. One way in the sense that God does all the work. The promises are all one sided. God sets the relationship up. God lays down the round rules. God makes and delivers all the promises. And God's covenant is also different to marriage because it's eternal. God will never let it fail, no matter what happens.

And that's a great thing to know that God's promises don't depend on us! Because **we** fail. We make mistakes. God says: these are my promises, I will keep them no matter what. **But** if you want to remain in this covenant, here is how you need to respond... So let's have a look at the covenant God makes – what God says **he** will do and how he wants Abraham to respond:

- What will God do? (Genesis 17:2-8)

Three promises – the same as his promises to Abraham in Genesis 12:

1. Abraham will be the Father of many nations (verse 5), 2. His name will be great (verse 6) and 3. God will give them the land of Canaan (verse 8). Three promises: great nation, great name, and land.

- What will Abraham do to respond to God? (Genesis 17:9-14) Verse 10, God says: *"Every male among you shall be circumcised."*

God gives Abraham the sign of circumcision. Now it's important to understand that circumcision does not MAKE them God's people. It's a sign of their relationship that already exists. In the same way that a wedding ring is a sign of a relationship that already exists. A wedding ring doesn't make you married. It points to the fact that you **are** married.

But why circumcision? Let me suggest 2 good reasons:

1. First of all, it's permanent and irreversible!

- Like a tattoo. (picture) A tattoo is fairly permanent. And difficult to remove except with painful laser treatment! But you cannot undo circumcision! Not even with laser therapy! So it's God's way of saying: This is a permanent and eternal relationship.
- 2. Second, circumcision is a constant reminder. This **physical flesh change** constantly reminds them who they belong to.

But circumcision is just a sign. And God constantly reminds his people that physical circumcision means nothing without a change of heart. In Deuteronomy 30:6, Moses says:

- *"The lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul and live."*

The sign of circumcision points to the reality that our **heart** needs to be "circumcised". In other words, our heart needs to be completely and permanently given over to God.

**III** – I remember going to a night club once – a long time ago – and my friend wasn't allowed in because he had the wrong type of shoes on!

Circumcision is not like that! It's not like a badge that "gets you into the club"! It was a sign of the relationship they **already had** with God – a sign that their hearts, their lives, belonged to God.

## But what does circumcision mean for us today?

In Colossians 2:11-12, Paul writes to the Gentiles, the non-Jews – people like us – and he says:

- *<sup>11</sup> In him (Christ) 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, <sup>12</sup> having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.*

We are "circumcised" in Christ. Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, Jesus took our sin upon himself, and crucified, circumcised, our sinful nature. And we respond to Jesus by fully committing our hearts to Him. Baptism is the sign that we have buried our old life and been raised with new life, eternal life, through Jesus.

- So Circumcision was the OLD Covenant sign to remind God's people of what God **would do**.
- And Baptism is the NEW Covenant sign given to us to remind us of what God **has done** through Jesus.

So we are children of Abraham because the New Covenant of Baptism flows out of the OLD Covenant of Circumcision. What God WILL do through Abraham. What God HAS done through Jesus. All connected.

## So what happens next?

- First, what does God do? (Genesis 17:15-16, Genesis 17: 19-22)

God promises Abraham and Sarah a son, Isaac. He says this will happen when Abraham is 100 and Sarah is 90.

- And what does Abraham do? (Genesis 17:17-18, Genesis 17:23-27 )

He laughs! Which is actually what the name Isaac means – "He laughs"

You see, in chapter 16, 13 years earlier, we read how Abraham and Sarah gave up on God's plans to give them a child so they decided that Abraham should sleep with Sarah's maidservant, Hagar. And they had a baby they named Ishmael. So when Abraham hears that God still wants to give him a child, he laughs! And when he realises God is serious, he says: Can't you just make **Ishmael** the child for this covenant? Why do we need to have another son?

Can you imagine laughing at God's plans? Maybe we don't actually laugh. Or maybe we just simply **don't believe** that God can do anything. Maybe we give up hope, or prayer, or even faith, because for some reason we forget that God is who he says he is: "God Almighty".

But that is who God is: he is "God Almighty." Do we believe that? Do we believe that there is nothing he cannot do? That there are NO plans of ours that are better than his? And that there is no reason to think that His plans are impossible?

So, finally, Abraham accepts God's word. And you have to love his response. In verse 23 when God leaves him:

- *"On that very day Abraham took his son Ishmael and all those born in his household or bought with his money, every male in his household, and circumcised them as God told him."*

It's a great response. Abraham doesn't say – Oh, well, look, it's getting late. Let's think about it tomorrow." What does he do? *"On that very day..."* On that very day Abraham circumcises himself and all the males in his family. Again, Abraham is a great lesson in faith for us. Let's finish today looking at the 3 ways he responds to God:

1. Immediately.
2. Completely.
3. Obediently.

## How do YOU respond to God?

Do you respond to God Almighty like that?

**III** – I wonder if we sometimes treat God a bit like the way some people treat a Credit Card bill. Some people get their credit card bill and they wait and wait, until it's overdue, then they pay the minimum. **They put it off, they ignore or disobey the due date by paying it late, and then they give as little as they can.**

Our attitude needs to be the OPPOSITE of that in the way we follow God. We need to respond:

- **Immediately, Completely, and Obediently.**

An example of each of those as we finish today:

1. **Immediately**: Do you ever put off what you know is the **right** thing to do? Maybe it seems too hard or you're not sure of the outcome? Don't put off until tomorrow what God calls you to do today. There's possibly a very good reason he wants you to do it today! Be immediate.
2. **Completely**: Sometimes we can respond immediately but not completely. For example: God calls me to be generous with my time, or my money, or my skills. I know he would like me to give "this much", but I'm just going to give "this much" because it's easier, or more comfortable to give "this much". But that's an **incomplete** response to God. Be complete.
3. **Obediently**: For example, we might say – "I think God wants me to do this... but that's pretty hard, so I'll do this instead, and see what happens. He'll still love me!" And yes he will. But that's not the point.

Throughout history, God is faithful. And the right way for us to respond to God is to be **complete, immediate and obedient** with our lives. And yes, we may fail. Probably every day! But our hearts should be aiming high! Our hearts should be aiming to be **Complete and Immediate** and **Obedient**. Always aiming to give God our best. Not what's left over. Not what's comfortable. Not what's easy. But what he deserves. Immediate, complete obedience.

**III** – Think of one way God has called you to serve. Prayer? Kid's Ministry? Home group. Pastoral Care. Do those 3 words apply? Let's pray.