

Genesis 12:1-3

Covenant: Pact of Intimacy

I come to this morning's text with certain questions. Questions for God and questions for all of us.

What is a covenant?

Why did God choose Abraham?

What is God's purpose in all of this and how does God's purpose affect all of us?

A covenant in the ancient near east was a binding legal agreement between individuals and groups. A covenant with God is much deeper than a simple legal document. A covenant is a pact with God. There is no back and forth over the terms of the agreement. God offers the agreement and either we agree or we don't. In this morning's passage God offers a covenant to Abram.

"Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth will bless themselves" (Genesis 12:1-3 RSV).

In the ancient near east there were a lot of "g"ods whom people worshipped. However, it was generally agreed there was one god above all the others. In Genesis 14 there is a war between seven or eight neighboring communities and Abram's nephew Lot is taken captive. Abram asks for God's permission and plunges into the conflict with about 200 of his servants. Abram is victorious. After the battle the king of Salem brings bread and wine to bless Abram because the King of Salem, Melchiz'edek by name is a priest of the, "God Most High."

**"Blessed be Abram by God Most High,
maker of heaven and earth;
And blessed be God Most High,
who has delivered your enemies
into your hand" (Genesis 14:19-20).**

The people were generally aware there was a God above all gods but they only knew of God as we would know an acquaintance down in Charlotte or up in Raleigh. They did not know God. This is important. Brothers and sisters please hear me when I say this. God does not want to be your acquaintance. **GOD WANTS TO KNOW YOU.**

By a show of hands how many of y'all are familiar with the phrase, "yada, yada, yada"? (**pause**) What does yada, yada, yada mean? (**pause**) In Genesis 4:1 Adam "yada," Eve his wife and she conceived and bore Cain. Adam knew his wife in a very intimate way, and God wants us to know God in this same kind of way. God wants a personal, intimate relationship with humanity. I believe God made this pact; this covenant with Abram because God wants all of humanity to know God in a very deep and intimate way. This explains why Paul refers to the church as the bride of Christ.

So let me ask y'all this. (**pause**) Why Abram? Why did God choose Abram to make this promise? God chose to create a specific people who would be God's own people. Through these people all the peoples of the earth would be blessed. These people would yada – know God. They would spread the word about how good it is to know and be known by God and encourage others to do likewise.

So why Abram? Abram was an old man beyond child rearing years. Abram's wife, Sarai, was a barren old woman who just happened to be Abram's half-sister. (um.. yuck.) Having children in the ancient near east was a BIG deal. Not only was it a practical issue because they needed hands to do the work of watching sheep and fighting off enemies. There was the issue of survival, and the question of immortality. They had no concept of

heaven and eternal life. If they wanted their name to be remembered forever they needed children who would survive after them. This idea is still alive today. My full name is Edward Richard Blount III. Why do you suppose my parents named me the third? They wanted that name to be carried forward. The irony of this story is Abram's name meant father. Sarai's name meant princess. After God makes this covenant with Abram and Sarai, in the fullness of time God changes their names to Abraham and Sarai, the father and princess of multitudes. (pause) How can this be? They are both old and barren. They have tried for decades and decades to have children and by their own power and ability they were helpless. (pause) And yet by God's power their names were changed and they were given a son, Isaac. Isaac would beget twins Jacob and Essau. Jacob had four wives and 12 children, and now the family is truly up and on it's way. (pause) But none of it was possible without God. I think God chose Abram to introduce God's self as more than just an acquaintance. God chose Abram to tell the world, it is good to know God because God does what human beings cannot. God creates where human beings cannot. God is truly God and humanity is not, and our God wants to truly know us.

What is God's purpose in making covenants with humanity, and how does that affect all of us?

In Genesis 2 God formed man from the dust of the ground. Woman was created from Adam's rib. We are tied to creation in ways God is not. When humanity was disobedient and sinned it was not just we who fell, but all of creation with us. We are tied together. In John 3:16 Jesus tells Nicodemus, **"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life."** God loves creation, and God is working to restore creation. Creation fell because humanity fell. The only way to restore creation is to restore humanity. In the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve knew God in a very personal intimate way. When we chose to be disobedient we completely scrapped the intimacy in which we knew God. The relationship was broken. We are just as powerless to restore our relationship with God as Abram and Sarai were to have children. However, in God's love, power and grace Abraham and Sarah were able to bear children. In God's love and grace God sent God's only son than if we would just believe in him we would know everlasting life.

However, we have to do our part in this covenant. God told Abram to, "Go." If Abram went where God told him to go God would bless those who bless him, and curse those who curse him and through Abram all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Jesus told the disciples and all of us to, **"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you"** (Matt 28:19-20). Sisters and brothers how are we do complete this final command from our God and King Jesus Christ? We have no power to do so on our own authority. Certainly, we must look to God and seek to know God in the kind of intimate way Adam and Eve knew God in the garden before the Fall. We must seek to know God in the same way God yada – knew Abraham and Sarah. I think this is where Rueben P. Job's description of the third rule of John Wesley's class meetings is correct. We must grow more in love with God. We must attend to the ordinances of God. We must pray. We must tithe. We must fast. We must participate in the sacraments as often as we may. We must search, not study, but search Scriptures to better understand God's word so that we might better know God. Once we know how good it is to be known by God we will know just why it is so important for everyone else to know God as well. It's time to ask yourselves my brothers and sisters. How well do you know God? How good is God's love for you? How eager are you to obey God's command to share God's love with others?

In the name of Jesus Christ,

Amen