

### Sermon Transcript

Well, this morning, we are back in the book of Genesis, if you were here last week, we covered chapter 16 and the title of today's message is never be content with anything less than God intended. If you're here last week, you read or you have a notion of what where I'm leading with that. So we're going to be here in the book of [Genesis Chapter 17](#). If you need a Bible, we've got something to hand out, otherwise, if you want one, you're welcome to have them. Somebody will help you. Subtitled, O Lord, grant me a high and holy ambition. So, this morning, justice chapter 17, when we meet our friend Abram, we find a man who has gotten into the very bad habit of being content with something less than God's very best. And that's very common, but it's also, I would suggest to you, very sad. The Danish philosopher Kierkegaard, he illustrates that very sad condition with a, I think, a marvelous parable. He tells a story about how one springtime, a goose was flying with his mates across northern Europe. And during that flight, he dropped down into a neighborhood, barnyard, where there were some tame ducks, and he enjoyed some of their corn. He stayed for an hour and then he stayed for a day and then he stayed for a week, and then, of course, a week became a month because he loved the good food in the barnyards so much, and it was a safe place to live. So he stayed all summer. But one autumn day, when the flocks of wild geese were singing their way southward once again, they passed over that very same barn barnyard, and their mate heard their cries. You ever hear geese honking as they fly overhead? Well, all of a sudden he was stirred with a strange thrill of joy and delight. And with a great flapping of his wings, he attempted to join his old comrades in flight. But the good food had made him soft and heavy, and he could fly no higher than the eaves of the barn. So he dropped back down again and he said to himself, oh, well, my life is safe and the food is good here. But

every spring and autumn, when he heard the wild geese honking, his eyes would brighten and gleam for just a moment, and he'd flap his wings, but finally, the day came when the geese flew overhead, they uttered their cry, but he paid not the least attention. When we approach Genesis chapter 17, let's try this morning, as best we can, try to put our ourselves in Abrams's place. He is 99 years old. I know I don't think anybody's 99 years old. But we could try to put ourselves in his place. God hasn't spoken to him as far as we know from the word for 13 long years. Abram has concluded that Ishmael, his son by Hagar, his wife's servant, is his only hope for an heir for a family, how God will provide his promise. So Abram, we find this morning, has become content with something less than God's very best. So here in Genesis chapter 17, we discover four new names that challenge Abram's complacency, and perhaps ours, and then one name that really should define all of us. So let's prayer this morning. Father, as we we begin to enter and look at your inspired, holy, authoritative word, but I just pray that you take the words of my mouth, Lord, may they not be this guy who's been around for a few decades. But, Lord, I pray that you through your Holy Spirit, speak to us, through your inspired word, and apply your word as each one needed needs to hear it today. We're all coming from different situations and backgrounds and issues in lives, some joyful, some troublesome, and Lord, we need to hear from you this morning, and thank you that you promise that your word never returns void. So speak to our hearts, our spirits today, I ask Christ's name. Amen. So, the very first name we come across in today's passage, we find in verse 1 and two. So, this is Genesis [chapter 17](#) Now, when Abram was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, I am Shai. God Almighty, walk me and be blameless, I will establish my covenant between me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly. So the passage begins with a revelation, and pause for a moment, and think what an

encouraging thought this passage really should be to all of us. Abrahams, 99 years old, he is very old, and yet God comes to remind him that he is not finished with his servant Abraham yet. And so, to my new, but mostly old friends this morning, I don't care how old you are if you are a son or a daughter of the most high God. And you can be sure if you're breathing, and God hasn't finished with you yet, either. He's got something for you to do, and I preach our brothers talking about that just this morning. So anyway, this breaks 13 years of silence and God brings a statement of self identification. He says, I am El Shadai. Some of us are oldest enough to remember that in 1982, Amy Grant made the song El Shadada. I don't think she wrote it. I can't remember who it was somebody else's. But anyway, she made that song famous as she sang age to H, you're still the same by the power of that name. You know, speaking about the immutability of God, this eternal God whom we worshiped. God Almighty, He magnified El Sharan. And that term El Shaddai, you find 48 times in your Old Testament, and each of those 48 times, it is translated in the English Bible as God Almighty. L is kind of a generic Hebrew name for God. It speaks of power. But what does shai mean? And actually, biblical linguist scholars, they don't all agree. So here's a big breakdown of kind of the different interpretations of Shaddai. The traditional view is Shaddai means God Almighty, or God all-sufficient. And that's probably the translation you're going to find in your English Bible, and that stems from the conviction that Shaddai comes from a root word Shaddai that means to overcome or to destroy. God Almighty, also vision. Some scholars think that they link the word "Shai to the Akkadian word shu, meaning mountain, suggesting, you know, God is high, he's lifted up. He's to be adored. He's transcendent. Mighty, like a mountain. A less common interpretation, but I think one that has a lot of significant theological implications suggests that Shadai comes from the Hebrew word

shad, which means breast. And this interpretation kind of puts the emphasis on God's providing nature, his nurturing characteristics. Metamorphically, we could say a mountain is a breast that rises up from the plain, and certainly a mountain is a symbol of strength. So if you combine all of those potential interpretations, Warren Wersme, one of my favorite Bible scholars. Warren Wersby states El Shadai is the name of the all-powerful, all sufficient God who can do anything and meet any need. And I like that summer of those possible interpretations. But back in our passage, why would God reveal His name, this particular name to Abram at this time after 13 years of silence? Well, as we'll soon discover, it's because God is about to tell his friend that his wife, his old wife, Sarai, will bear a son. And so the Lord wanted Abram to know, as he wants you and I to know, that he indeed is still all sufficient. He is all powerful. And then that's exactly what the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, translates El Shaddai. But it's a timely instruction too, because remember, Abram has waited 13 long years. In the midst of kind of family strife and difficulty, Sarah and Hagar are no longer getting along. We learned that last week. All that turmoil, as a result of his sinful decision, way back when, 13 years ago. Now, Abram's about to learn how God's promises are fulfilled, as Zachariah tells us, not by mine, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord, El Sedi, Lord Almighty. Friends, that's always a good thing to keep in mind. He is ours. You're in my El Shaddai. The Lord Almighty. The Lord all sufficient. The question is, in the ordinary affairs of everyday life, did we really believe in? Is there anything too difficult in your life for God to be sufficient for? Can he restore Abram's marriage? Can he transform prodigal son or daughter, mother, brother, sister? Can he redeem whatever physical pain, or maybe emotional heartache, you? I do we deal with in life? If he is El Sadai, then surely, he can. And he will. The question is, will we trust him to work

through the pain, through the difficulties, everything we face in life? That's my question. And I think that's what God is asking Abram at this juncture. Will you trust me? If you recall back in Genis chapter 14, Abram led 38 of the men, his servants, his shepherds, that were born in his household. To rescue Lot after four kings from the east had come and captured all the cities on the plain, including Sodom, where Lot was living at the time. And Abram and those 318 men pursued those armies, huge armies, four kings, all the way to Damascus and rescued his nephew La. And after Abram did battle with those four kings, God came and said to him, after he meets, Melchizedek, after he refuses the wealth of Sodomy, if you are familiar with the passage, you might remember that the king of Sodom said, You've rescued us, all these goods that the kings stole from our city. They belong to you now, and Abraham. Remember what he said? I won't take a thong from your sandal, lest you say, you know, King Sodom made Abram rich. After all of that, God said to him, "Do not fear, Abram. I am a shield to you." Then a little bit later, he said, "After you refuse Sodom's wealth, God told them, Look to me. I am your exceedingly great." Reward. So now in Genesis chapter 17, Abram and Sarai are in the words of the New Testament, as good as dead, reproductively speaking, God appears again to reassure them that he is more than sufficient, more than able to bring about a miracle birth. He is, God says, I am El Shadai, God Almighty, never forget friends that God is sufficient to meet each and every need in your life, too. But remember, with revelation, always comes responsibility. And so God says to Abram in verse 1, "Walk before me." I like the fact, and I encourage you to notice this morning, that does the doesn't tell Abram. You know, I want you to run or jog or strive or make a mad dash, or, you know, discipline yourself and work really hard at this. He doesn't say that. Just walk before me. I know Bill has experienced a lot of back pain, and I have periodically in my

life, thank God, I haven't had it in recent years, but when I wake up in the morning with lower back pain, which I had for years, and I tried chiropractic, I tried heat pads, you know, I tried whirlpool, I tried paying pills, but I know, even today, if I wake up in the morning with a bad back and it hurts a lot, the only remedy is to get up and walk it off. That is the only thing that helps. And I feel like a lot of people fail to realize how simple and straightforward that Christian life is. It requires a slow, steady, consistent, day by day, walking in the spirit with Jesus. It doesn't happen, by, taking a 30 day spiritual victory class or reading this book or attending that seminar, or having someone lay hands on you that's supposedly annoying. It doesn't happen by attending that seminar. A simple, consistent walk with God is not flashy, it's not a quick fix. But if you keep walking in the same direction, eventually, you'll get where you're headed. And for you and I, as every believer in Christ, Jesus, that direction, is holiness. So again, the question, are you walking with the Lord today? God tells Abram, walk before me. That's how you get there. And B, blameless. I don't know about you, but blameless the I, that sounds like an impossible, hurdle, you're thrown in my way. Be blameless, really? Well, if you look at the etymology of that Hebrew word for blameless, it conveys the idea of being complete. being whole, or having integrity. The same exact Hebrew word is used in [Exodus chapter 12](#), verse 5 to describe an unblemished sacrifice. That's Israelites had to bring on. Unblemished sacrifice. Whole, complete, without blemish, with integrity. So, blameless, I think it refers to that person who, you know, it's just walks before God, day by day, authentically, someone who, you, fears God and seeks to honor God in their life, and yes, will fall down, but when they do, they get up and the rest of themselves off. They' repent, say, God, forgive me, I receive that today, and I'm going on. I'm walking with you. So what a challenge. Walk before me and be blameless. God says to Abram,

God says to me, God says to you, Somebody wisely said, "We are only as righteous as we act when no one else is looking." And that's pretty good measure for righteousness, I think. So God wants you I, his disciples to be people of integrity, authenticity, not duplicity. And if you think, which you might all tend to do, that you think that Holiness is an impossible goal, consider Woodrow Wilson's advice. He said, I would rather fail in a cause that will ultimately succeed than to succeed in a cause that will ultimately fail. Yeah. God said he who began and we're good work in you. He's going to give up on you? He doesn't say that. He will bring it to fruition to the day of completion. Also, Where am I? Not on that page. Gosh, where am I? Oh, yeah, a guy named James Lowell. I like his thought. Chris, you might like this. Not failure, but low aim is the crime. A low. You know, I think, we always fear failure. I won't attempt to do it because I might, I might fall my face, and will laugh at me, I'll be humiliated, but no, man, failure never killed anybody. But low aim. Can not kill somebody, but we don't hit the target, right? Well, we dare not aim low. We must, as Abram illustrates next, we must bow low before El Shadai. verse three states. Abram fell on his face before God. He fell on his face, and you find that a lot in the Old Testament, when God shows up. People fall in their face. But why did Abram respond so demonstratively? He fell in his face. I think it's because our posture reflects, right, what's happening inside reflects the attitude of our heart. It's simply body language. We can't meet God with a yawn and a whole, right? Then, if he truly is Al Shadai, then we would expect that we would express that in our posture. It's a little bit hard, especially you we're kind of a new, we're still getting acquainted with them another, and you'll see here some people will sit down there and worship, some people stand up. Some people are kind of frozen chosen and that's probably describes me, and some people are very demonstrative. You know, they want to shout and up,

stand up and down. Our pastor, Fred, I love him. He's kind of on the demonstrative side. You know, I need that kind of little encouragement, but our posture reflects the attitude of our heart. And so how should that be demonstrated in our worship? I think that's a good topic for one of our Wednesday coffee clashes. We talk about how do we express our worship? And you know, just because someone's real excited it doesn't mean there are any more committed or blessed or, you know heartfelt in someone who's a little more stoic, but it would be interesting to discuss that when Abraham, anyway, response demonstratively. So, thus far, we have seen that revelation leads to responsibility, because ultimately it's all about a relationship. Whereas four, as for me, behold, God is speaking to Abram, as for me, behold, my covenant is with you. That speaks of relationship. The phrase, my covenant's used nine times in this chapter, and it defines the parameters of this relationship God wants with Abram. Remember, it's not a new covenant actually is affirmation of God has previously promised Abram back in [chapter 12](#), and it's repeated again in [chapter 15](#), and now it shows up again, [chapter 17](#). And that covenant, this promise includes several critical things. First of all, it included land. God promised Abram and his descendants that the land the land of Canaan would be their everlasting possession. It The covenant also included descendants, Scott promised Abram numerous descendants, promising to make him the father of many nations. Then finally, probably the best thing in this covenant is the promise of a blessing. God promised to bless Abraham, to make his name great, and that through him, all the families of the earth. You and me this morning will be blessed. Now, Cordy, that's a reference to the promised Messiah. So, think about what an encouragement, that must have been to Abram. In spite of his detour, we looked at last week with Hagar, God is still going to honor his unilateral, unconditional covenant with him." Can you see how that demonstrates God's

character? It's a dramatic picture of what we read in 2 Timothy chap 2 If we are faithless, which Abram was, he remains faithful because that's who he is. He can't act contrary to his nature. He can't disown himself. So regardless of what you and I have done in the past, God still wants to extend his grace and his mercy toward us. So today, God says to any all prodigals return to me. I want to restore you. I want to welcome you home. I want to put that ring back on your finger. I want to give you that robe. I want to throw a party. I love you that much. And I want to have that intimate relationship with you. Okay, so God has reintroduced himself to Abram with a new name, and now it's Abram's turn. He gets a new name. The second part of verse four and five. It says, "and you will be a father to a multitude of nations, no longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be called Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations." And as we continue in the text, we discover that God gives Abram three instructions about a people that he will be the patriarch of the land, and then, number three, the sign of this covenant. So, let's start with the people to encourage, I think, Abram's faith, God says, I'm going to give you a new name. From now on, you will be known as Abraham. Abram means exalted father. And he was a father, Ishmael at this point. But the name Abraham means something better. Father of a multitude. And yet, you think about that name change, I wonder how Abram felt when he had to go to his wife, Shra, and all his servants, and everybody in the extended film, how did he how did he make that announcement to all of them? You could almost hear that one of his servants, you kind of whispering in the background, you, you gotta be kidding me. What a joke. He when he has one child, his wife's servant Hagar. He's been out in the sun too long. The ---s too long night. Losing that. So, I honestly think it must have been somewhat of a humbling experience for Abram and that is exactly the point. God humbles us before he blesses us. Story

told about, and I can kind of relate to say, you, you get out of seminary, you think you know it all. But anyway, the story is told about a young Scottish preacher, supposedly he stepped proudly into the pulpit one Sunday morning to preach his very first sermon, and he had prepared, he was ready, he was excited. But supposedly, the longer he preached, the more obvious it was that the Lord was not in the wind. And studiously, that young preacher finished abruptly. He left the pulpit with his head bowed, and his pride was just demolished. It hadn't gone the way he anticipated. But afterwards, one of the deacons stepped up to this young preacher, and he said, "If you had gone into the pulpit the way you came down from the pulpit, you might have come down from the pulpit the way you went into. And I think something like that is happening with this name change. It's a humbling reminder. Isn't it incredible and wonderful that God takes insignificant, ordinary, humble people like you and me and incredibly uses us beyond our wildest expectations. So that's the promise about a people. Now there's a promise about a land. And the first two words of verse 6 say, I will. In the words, it's a unilateral, unconditional promise. I will. And those two words occur five times in verses 6 through 8, which occurs 15 times. I will" in chapter 17. So let's look at that. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, I will make nations come from you, and kings will come forth from you. So keep in mind that Abram's descendants include not only the Jewish people, but a large part of the Arab world as well. But G says, better than that, kings will eventually come from you, culminating ultimately in the king of kings, the Lord Jesus Christ. verse 7, I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God to you and to your descendants after you. So Abram's addressing a single individual, Abram, Abraham now, his servant, but he's talking about the influence he'll have. Of course, we all have

to come to Jesus on our own. We can't inherit Jesus, not because your mom and dad were Christians. You come to Jesus individually as sinners, you know, and seeking a Savior. But along the way, you know, don't we all hope to be a blessing, to bring a few, a friend, a family member along with us? Of course, we do. And that's Scott's promise to Abram. Ise Abe, I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojourning's, all the land of Cana, for an everlasting possession. So God's everlasting covenant promise included an everlasting covenant possession. The land of Canaan. And obviously, as you're well aware of that land is still a battleground today, and probably always will be until the Lord comes. But as far as God's covenant is concerned, that land belongs to Israel. The Jew's ownership of that land depends solely on God's gracious, unconditional covenant with them, with Abraham. However, their possession and their enjoyment of that land depends on their faithfulness to follow, to follow God. And that's the theme of Moses' message throughout the book of Deuteronomy, more than 60 times. Moses tells the Israelites that they need to go in and inherit the promised possession that God gave them. But then he simultaneously goes on and says, "Don't forget, remember, keep on following, worshiping the Lord God. And yet, think about it. The only piece of ground that the patriarchs ever truly possessed and owned was the cave that later Abram buys from Ephron to become a family tomb. Eventually. buried there. Janis 233. You also recall eventually over the years Jacob and his family had to leave that promised land during a famine and go down to Egypt. They thought they'd just be there for a short few months or maybe a year or so, but they ended up 400 years. And they're in Egypt until God's appointed time to return to that promised land. Moses led them out, but Joshua was the warrior that helped them conquer the inhabitants then and to claim their inheritance. But as you know, the people didn't stay true to that coven.

And so God disciplined them in the land by bringing their enemy forces conquering cities and a lot of heartache and war in the process. He appointed enemy nations to defeat Israel and put her in bondage. Israel was in the land, but Israel did not control the land. During the reigns of David and King Solomon, they enjoyed that promised inheritance fully to the most extent ever. But after the divided kingdom after Solomon, you realize it was divided king, Israel and the north, and Judah in the South, Assyria defeated Israel, conquered them, and took them away, later Babylon conquered Judah, brought them to Babylon. It was if, as if God was saying, you polluted my land with your idols, and now I'm going to put you in a land that's addicted to idols, go for it, get your fill. But after he promises, after you've been there for 70 years, I'm going to send you back, because I have made you a everlasting promise that will be fulfilled. So God permitted under King Cyrus, are you remnant to return to the land of Israel and Nehemiah, that rebuilt the walls, rebuilt part of Jerusalem? They restored the nation, but it never became powerful again. Here's the point. Whether Israel is faithful or faithless, God didn't change his mind.. They will inherit the land, because that's God's everlasting covenant with Abram. All right, let's go back to James chapter 70, verse 8. The second part of verse 8 says, I will be your God, I will be their God, your descendants. I will be their God. And I think that last phrase is pretty significant. See, God wants that relationship, we have with him to be life changing. Now, Christianity, you, it's not an activity. It's not something we do on Sunday. It's not a moniker, a name that we declare or enjoy. Christian, it's a lifestyle. It's a day to day, personal relationship with God. Imagine someone saying, Oh, yes, I'm married, but it doesn't affect my life very well. very much. I do what I want with my time and with my money. No, I don't spend too much time with my wife. Yeah, occasionally we talk, but usually it's when I need something from her. That

would be absurd, and yet.. a lot of people behave that way with God, right? El Shaddai says to Abram and to his yet to be descendants, I will be there gone. So Arla, our relationship with God should be life changing, because He is that. He's our master. He's our creator, our Savior, our Lord, and a good friend, but He's gone, always God. So moving along, let's think about the sign of the covenant, and I think when I told Bill and Chris that we're going to do Genesis 17, I said, oh, my, how I find songs for Jesus Christ? You did well. You did well. But let's look at the sign the Covenant, starting verse 9. God said further to Abram, "Now as for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout your generations. This is my covenant which you shall keep between me and you and your descendants, after you, every male among you shall be circumcised. And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you, and every male among you who's eight days old shall be circumcised throughout all generations, a servant who is born in your house, or who is bought with money from any foreigner who is not of your own descendants, a servant who is born in your house, or who is bought with your money shall surely be circumcised. Thus shall my covenant be in your flesh and everlasting covenant, but an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people, he has broken my covenant. So passages like that and other places, talks about circumcision, you know, it raises some questions. In our modern 21st century, no doubt. First of all, I ask the question, if this is a unilateral unconditional covenant. Why are any demands at all put on Abram? I think the answer is simple, but it's very significant. It's a big scheme of systematic theology. Within God's unconditional promises. He always gives us commands. And we've seen that a couple of times already, just last week. God commanded Abram and Sarah, "Leave your home, your family, and

the Chaldees, travel hundreds of miles. Go to this land, I'm going to show you. I'll give it to you." If you're ready to look at this morning, you've been commanded to walk before him and be blameless. And now he gives them a new command. Abram must circumcise all the males in his household, including servants and shepherds, as a sign of the covenant. So although God's promises were unconditional, depended solely on him, Abrams participation in the blessings of that covenant were impacted by his own un faithfulness or unfaithfulness. And the same, today, for you and me. So that reminds us that God's sovereignty and human responsibility. There's no conflict there. God's sovereignty and free will they go hand in hand, and you see it throughout scripture. But now let's talk about this thing called circumcision. I remember in 1993, a funny kind of satirical twist on a classic movie came out called Robin Hood. Merry Men in Tights and if you're the one's laughing, so you probably saw it. You're probably still find it on, somewhere on YouTube or something. Anyway, that film, it was written by Mel Brooks, who was a very, I don't know, it was a famous Jewish writer and comedian. In fact, Mel Brooks even does a cameo appearance in the movie, playing the part of Rabbi Tuckman, replacing the well known character of Friar Tuck. And Mel Brook's comes around to Robin Hood and his Merry Men in Tights, and he's offering some circumcision. So the question is, why in the world would God choose such a sign? Well, maybe it helps to think about it. You know, I wonder that, and I think it's like it's all be question, right? What do they say about smart people wonder, ask questions, I can't remember how that goes. But anyway, we should try to come to some idea of what's at all about. Why would God choose this sign? I think I recommend that you think about it this way. Circumcision was a physical witness to a spiritual reality. Keep in mind that circumcision wasn't something unique and special for the Hebrews. And the ancient Near East, other neighboring nations also

practiced circumcision. And right here in verse 12 chapter 17, from the very beginning, you, this covenant and the sign of the covenant was open to Gentiles, and servant, you comes into your family or you hire, higher or by. So keep in mind, circumcision was not a racial badge. It was a sign of participation in the covenant. It's a physical sign of a spiritual reality. It's not a physical sign of an ethnic identity. No. Unfortunately, the Jewish people eventually made circumcision a ritual and a means of self righteousness. And that's where it went all bad. And the Jewish mind, circumcision was a guaranteed, you're accepted by God. You're in the family. You're okay. But you know, some people do they make that same false confidence that have that same false they put in baptism, they're baptism or communion or any one of numerous, you know, religious rituals that they're trusting in to have this relationship with God. It doesn't work that way. They can be meaningful when practiced appropriately, biblically. But never forget, in Romans chapter 4, the Apostle, the author makes it abundantly clear that that physical operation had absolutely nothing to do with Abrams's eternal security/ salvation. The Scripture records that Abram believed God, and it was accorded to him counted to him as righteousness. Even before God ever brought up any instructions about circumstance, it was his faith that made him righteous. What do we say? We say, we're saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ Jesus alone. So, circumcision was not the means of salvation, but a mark of that covenant of special relationship with God. And you remember the legalistic party in the early church tried to impose circumcision on the Gentile believers. Paul returns for a conference in Jerusalem and [Acts chapter 15](#), and they have this big debate, but they conclude circumcision was not required of the Gentiles, and they write a letter and send it to all those new Gentile churches. But again, I go back to that basic query. Why did God choose this particular sign? After all, it was so private, so

personal. Few people would ever see it. people would know. One is or isn't circumcised. Now, why didn't God choose some other kind of mark? Why not piercing of your ear, a tattoo on the cheek? You know, something that would be visual, and people would understand. Here's my conclusion. You, I encouraged you to think about. As a sign of the covenant, circumcision, in some way, must symbolize the purpose and the promise of the covenant. That physical sign had something to do with the purpose and the promise of God's eternal covenant. The question, of course, is how. Well, we can say with certainty that circumcision is an illustration of how you and I are to deal with sin to death. Circumcision reminded a man in a way that he could never, ever forget it. He belonged to God, body, soul, and spirit, entirely. To the extent that even our most intimate parts, the things that no one else will ever see, those parts are whole life, has to belong to the Lord as well. So, again, circumcision is united with the spiritual. In other words, we have to walk to talk. because there is absolutely nothing private between ourselves and our master. He sees it all. Even the things we try to hide away from other people. So I would be suggesting to you this morning that circumcision decision still matters to God. Only now it's not that physical procedure, it's the condition, the state of our heart, that God is looking at, that he cares so deeply about. And so we read, for example, in [Colossians chapter 2](#), verse 11, it says, "In him, you also were circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self, ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ. Be blameless, be complete. Be whole, be people of integrity. God's New Testament covenant seal extends much further than a physical sign. God has provided a way in which are words and are actions be living examples of a loving Savior. They can be displayed for all the world to see. So we read his promise in [Deuteronomy, chapter 30 verse 6](#), the Lord your God, will circumcise your heart and

the hearts of your descendants so that you may love him with all your heart, with all your soul, and live. Therefore, circumcision goes to the core of who we are, men, women. It doesn't matter our gender. It touches our soul, touches our nature. It touches the attitude we have. It touches our relationship with other people, our relationship with God, our creator. It's its inner circumcision of the heart, which is so important. And so God goes back and stresses it and repeats it again and again. In the book of [Deuteronomy chapter 10](#) He states, And now Israel, what does the Lord of your God ask of you? But to fear of the Lord your God, to walk on obedience to him, to love him, to serve the Lord, your God, with all of your heart, with all of your soul, and observe the Lord's commandments and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good, circumcise your hearts, therefore, do not be stiff necked. So over and over again, throughout the Word, God probes our commitment to him. His discerning eyes know exactly who we are or what we're thinking at any moment. You know, we can hide behind a Christian facade or a lot of verbiage. We're just naked before the Lord. He sees all of us. Just be sure to notice that God doesn't expect us to circumcise our own heart. That would be a futile undertaking. He says, he will do. But how? I think King David learned how, after he had sins against Uriah puts him on the right line so that he would perish in battle and then steals Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, and he's confronted with that sin. He later states, [Psalm 51](#). "Create in me a clean heart oh God." He gave up on his self-achieved. I can't do this. God, you create in me a clean heart, renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence. Take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation. Uphold me. Give me a willing spirit. In other words, it's the Holy Spirit who performs this act of circumcision on our heart. From Abram to David to all of circumcision of the heart is still a sign of God's covenant with us. Today, we have the irrevocable promise of

God a promise that he always keeps that once we put our trust in Jesus Christ as our Savior. The Holy Spirit, then, the third member of the Trinity, takes up residence in our human spirit, and the Holy Spirit begins to circumcise our Holy Spirit, after all, he is a person, right? He feels joy and excitement; he has a desire for our life. He calls him bereaved and annoyed. And the Holy Spirit communicating to our human Spirit makes us feel joyful and happy and fulfilled as we walk with God, but conversely, as we run in the opposite direction, you we feel guilty, we feel hampered, we feel unhappy. That's the Holy Spirit, changing us from the inside out us not some external thing that we have to perform. Friends, the point is don't dare settle for anything less. First [Corinthians chapter 6, verse 17](#), "He who joins himself the Lord becomes one spirit with him," The Holy Spirit working on human spirit, that make us like him, living examples of a loving Savior. Well, the third new name has to do with Abram's wife. God said, "Abram as for Sarah, your wife, you shall call her name you shall not call her name Sarah, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her indeed, I will give you a son by her. Then I will bless her and she shall be a mother of nations, kings of peoples, will come from her." So, since Sarah would become the mother of nations and kings, it's only fitting that she get a new name Sarah, that means princess. Remember, prior to this, the Lord had not specifically named as Sarah. Now, Sarah as the mother of the promised child. But now he does. Previously, Abram might have assumed that Ishmael would be the promised heir until God now says very clearly, very specifically. Sarah would bear his promised son. On three different occasions, laughter is associated with his promised child. Look what happens next, verse 17th. Abraham fell on his face and he laughed. He said in his heart. Didn't say this out loud, but God hurt him. Will a child be born to a man 100 years old and will Sarah, who is 90 years old, bear a child? He's laughing. He's laughing at God? Do we ever

do that? Uh, Warren Wearsby makes a side note here, but I think it's very pertinent. Children should be welcomed with joy. The womb of a mother is a holy of holies, where God is at work. How tragic that we turn it into a tomb, and that holy of holies into a holocaust. Yeah. Look at Abram's response to that promise, verse 18. Abrams said, "Oh, God. Would that Ishmael might live before you." God's talking about, I'm gonna give you a promise, son, a miracle child. And was Abraham? "Oh, God, may Ishmael live before. You almost feel the agony in Abram's request. I mean, for the last 10 years, 13 years, Abram has poured all of his love and all of his hopes and all of his dreams. He's trained Ishmael, he's walked with him, he's talked with him, he's invested in him, and Abram must have thought, "Lord, be reasonable. After all, Sarah's a very iffy proposition. I'm right here, it's a sure thing. I've started the process. So, remember, Abrams got into a very common but bad habit of being content with something less than God intended. Don't let that happen to you. The fourth new name in this passage is what this promised son's name will be. Verse 19. But God said, no, but Sarah, your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac, and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you, behold, I will bless him, I will make him fruitful and multiply him exceedingly. He shall become the father of 12 princes, and I shall make him into a great nation. But my covenant, I will establish with is the name for the yet unborn child. Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year. And when he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abram. Once again, God confirms the promise he made long ago, and he even gives that promise a name. Isaac, which, as you know, means laughter. And I love how ironic this is. It actually, I think Sarah realized that because later, basically, she said, "God always gets the last laugh. God has made laughter for me. Everyone

who hears it will laugh with me. Well, not in the text this morning about I have one last name to mention and we'll conclude with this. It is the name that we bear. Christian, Christ follower. I think we could apply the last few verses of the chapter this way. They really give us three characteristics of someone, anyone who calls themselves by this name. Christian. So look at verses 23 and following. Then Abraham took Ima, his son, and all the servants who were born in his house, all who were bought with his money, every mail among them of Abram's household. And he circumcised the flesh of their foreskin on that very same day, as God had said to him. Now, Abram was 99 years old when he was circumcised, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. And Ishmael, his son, was 13 years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. The very same day, Abraham was circumcised, so was Ishmael, his son, and all the men of his household who were born in his house or bought with money from a foreigner were circumcised with them. So observe, first of all that a Christian obedience should be complete. Abraham quote "circumcised every male in his household." Didn't he with himself, and every last male in his household? So that illustrates how obedience really should be complete. Secondly, Christ's obedience ought to be prompt. Abraham obeyed God, quote, "the very same day. No delays, no bargaining, but right away, Abraham knew that the late obedience is disobedience, and finally, number three, a Christian's obedience can sometimes be risk painful and risky. Circumcision, obviously, no-doubt was painful and disabling, especially for older boy or man. In fact, you might know the story in Genesis chapter 34 when Jacob's sons in retribution for the Shechamite prince raping their sister Diana, and the Shechamite prince said, "I want Diana, let her be my wife after you raped her." And Jacob's sons, "Oh, okay, but you know, to become one with us, we have to become one big family, you all have to be circumcised. And

while they were recovering from circumcision, Jacob's sons murdered every last Shechemite. So think about it. Abram's obedience, you, meant that for a period of time, his entire family would be defenseless. Yeah, he went ahead and bade God. So, in conclusion, I would say, let's also give a hand not, literally. But let's give a hand to Ishmael as well. Cause imagine this scenario. You're 99 year old father with trembling hands tells his 13 year old son, "Go back in my tent and get my flint knife because I'm going to circumcise everyone starting with you. I mean, most junior high kids, I mean, they complain that they have to take out the garbage. Somehow, Ishmael would they become a great archer. a Greek. Why? We can only surmise, but I believe it was because he knew ultimately that his father loved him. Secondly, because he knew his father wanted to be the Lord. So, here's my final challenge to all of us this morning. Our heavenly Father, your heavenly Father, He loves you. And when he decides, God decides, you're due for some heart surgery, some circumcision of the heart, yield to the master surgeon's hand. Work with him, let him shape you to the man and woman he sees you to be. And the second challenge is akin to the first, no matter what the cost, no matter who follows, who does it in your life. Let it be a model of obedience to Christ, a living example of a loving Savior, never be content with anything less than God intended. Jesus himself, Russia with that very same question on the night of his betrayal in the garden, Gethsemane. Remember what he said? "[Luke 22:42](#)? "Father, if you're willing to take this cup from me, but not your will. not my will, but your will be done." We're gonna celebrate communion in just a moment, but let's pray. Heavenly, Father, thank you for this passage, this section of Scripture, I love history, I love the narrative, because these people jump off the pages, they're real, they're not all that different than all of us gather here this morning. So I thank you, Lord, that we can look at Abram as a man who, sometimes on fire or sometimes cold, sometimes

we rush ahead, sometimes we lag behind your will, but nevertheless, Lord, he was obedient. He wanted to follow you. He became the patriarch, the father of our faith. Lord, help us to never shrink short of your very best for us. Help us to just have a high and holy ambition and to strive for that by your grace, through your Holy Spirit, and never quit, never once skip out. I love you, Laurie. Thank you for your word. Work in our hearts and spirits today, through your truth. may be life changing. I ask Jesus name, Amen.

The Lord bless you and keep you;  
the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;  
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.