

# The Marks of a Long Walk

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[0:00] I want to turn to Genesis chapter 17. Genesis chapter 17, Abram and Sarai had jumped the gun. God had made them a promise.

Didn't look like it was going to happen. And so after 10 years, they worked out how it was to be. And they didn't want to wait anymore on the Lord.

And that was a mistake. They worked out their other arrangements. And it turned out to be a bad deal that I believe when we look at not only history, but we look at modern day circumstances in the Middle East, we're still paying for it due to the Middle East rivalries of today that go back to Ishmael and his people.

And after he was born, there was 13 years of silence. God giving him promises of what he would do.

Him trying to carry them out himself. Realizing through the contentiousness that came from it that it must not be right.

[1:17] And then 13 years of waiting. And then this. Genesis chapter 17 beginning in verse 1.

When Abram was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, I am God Almighty. Walk before me and be blameless that I may make my covenant between me and you and may multiply you greatly.

Then Abram fell on his face and God said to him, Behold, my covenant is with you and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.

I'll make you exceedingly fruitful and I'll make you into nations and kings shall come from you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

And I'll give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession and I'll be their God. And God said to Abram, As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations.

[2:36] This is my covenant, which you shall keep between me and you and your offspring after you. Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you.

He who is eight years old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money shall surely be circumcised.

So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. Ray Steadman's wonderful preacher and pastor from Florida that's went home to be with the Lord.

He said one time, probably after a guy read a passage like this, that a fellow came in his office and said he wanted Ray to circumcise him. He said, when I picked myself up off the floor, I explained that Christians do not have to go through that to fulfill the covenant.

They don't have to fulfill that covenant. He said the man was relieved. It's not meant for us, but it sure does mean a lot.

[3:57] So I want to take a few moments this morning to see what it says and what it's done and what it means to us. And I want you to notice the first thing that God tells them to do was walk before me blameless because a life with the Lord is a long walk.

Sprints are easy. They're not as easy as they used to be, but they are easier than marathons because they don't last long. As a matter of fact, a sprint these days in my life would be really short, maybe just to get across the road in front of a speeding car.

Marathons are better because it don't last forever and it does take a long time to recuperate from it. But God just asked us to walk. Now some of you who are biblically keen will immediately pick up on, wait a minute, preacher.

Isaiah says that we shall mount up with wings like eagles. We shall run and not be weary. We shall walk and not faint. But the part we often miss about that majestic passage is the beginning when it says those that wait on the Lord.

Those that go at his time. Those that just walk before the Lord. Because when we try to run too fast and learn too quick, we'll run right past the opportunity of a deep and rich relationship with the Lord. [ 5 : 30 ] Speed can kill depth. You just don't take it in. And instead, God calls us to walk and to pay attention to what's happening.

Take it in. Do it right. Do it right. I've had people tell me, I read the Bible through this year. And for some I've thought, you read it too fast.

You need to let some of it stick. You know? Because it's not the consumption of some spiritual buffet that we're looking for. Instead, it's a steady diet of God's Word.

Taking a long walk before Him and learning. And walking before the Almighty, the El Shaddai. Now, when you do that long walk, I want to prepare you for it.

Because there will be, along the way, lots of commotion. Life is full of commotion today. There are a lot of options.

[ 6 : 36 ] And where we live, where we live a lot, want to align with God. And they just don't want to live for Him.

Affiliated in some sorts, but just not living for Him. Some type of religious experience is popular. But a long, steady walk with the Lord is rare.

And that's why so many are a mile wide and an inch deep. And when stuff happens, it overwhelms their lives. They're not prepared for it. Let me be clear today.

Stuff will happen. If somebody told you when you gave your heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ, that you wouldn't deal with stuff anymore. Life would be easy.

They lied to you. It's not true. Thank God you don't have to do it alone. Not only does God bring around you a bunch of good godly people who rely upon the Lord themselves to help usher you through the difficult days of your life called church.

[ 7 : 46 ] I mean, that's what we're here for. But at the same time, you've got the sweet Holy Spirit of God living within you. And He'll give you a peace unlike anything this world can give you.

And He'll never leave you alone. But stuff's going to happen. It did for Abram. He had conflicts with Lot.

He had infertility with Sarai. And some of those situations he handled correctly and some of them he did not. And thank God, God gives us the opportunity for renewal. Because there's a lot of commotion along the way.

There's also a lot of, lots of silence. And man, we don't like that. God's not always going to answer as clearly as we want Him to.

He's not going to always answer when we want Him to. And the reality is He seldom does. The walk of faith is about learning to trust Him instead of trying to get Him to comply with our wishes.

[ 8 : 57 ] And don't misunderstand me. He answers and He works and He moves and He prepares us. He guides us and He instructs us through His Word.

He does not scream into our lives very often. I have seldom heard a voice within me. And when God speaks to me, it's not audible.

It's louder than that. But I've heard it. And I can share those times with you.

But what I don't share so often is that fact that I do not get a clear answer a lot of the time. And I just continue to walk by faith. Because sometimes there's silence.

Abraham was plagued by years of silence. And after 13 years since he last heard from Him, those were silent years.

[ 9 : 58 ] No voice. No vision. No visit from God. It's a long walk, folks. But there's also lots of opportunity along the way.

Lots of opportunity. Because it's really not what happens to you. It's what happens to what happens to you. What do you do with what happens to you? He was about 79 years old and he had a great victory through the Lord.

And at 85, Sarah had him choose another way to have a child. And he ran ahead of God's plan. And he got tired of waiting. Six years is a long time to wait. Now at 99, he hears again. And I want you to notice his reaction. When he hears again, he just falls on his face before the Almighty. This term Almighty is used in the book of Job as well. Another man that had to wait. However, both men had opportunity. And when God spoke, he said walk. He also said walk blamelessly. [11:08] Which means walk unimpaired. Walk sound. Walk whole. Walk with integrity. And the two come together to walk before me and to be blameless.

That comes by making a choice in our lives. It comes by opportunity. And it may not sound very glamorous. Just walk steadily before the Lord in the midst of commotion and silence. And yes, opportunity. But I promise you, it's worth every minute of it. A life with the Lord is a long walk. It's also a marked life. God wanted such a commitment to be shown by having every male circumcised. And on the eighth day, they would circumcise their male children. When he put down this decree, all committed males, no matter what their age, needed to have this done as well. And notice that God did not say wear a particular garment. [12:27] God did not say shave or grow out your hair. He didn't say take on a tattoo or cut off a finger. He didn't say do that.

He gave them a very personal sign. It was a dedication of a child that left a mark, a very personal mark that showed him that his father had been faithful. And many did not understand that. And when we get to the New Testament, it was made out to be a means of salvation. Instead of a source of humility, it became a sign of pride. And Paul said, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, it's a symbol. He spent a lot of time explaining as the church was divided over what to do with this. He spent a lot of time, the apostle Paul did, explaining that it was a symbol. It was kind of like a wedding band of sorts. It was a symbol. And if I'm not faithful to my wife, this is just a piece of metal. [13:42] It's a symbol. Paul made it clear that we are to live marked lives. Our lives are to be different.

Our lives are to be marked in our heart. In Romans chapter two, verse 29, Paul says, circumcision is a matter of the heart. And so why did God ask for a physical mark from Abram? Because the foreskin, and that loose cap of flesh symbolized the fallen flesh of humanity. Colossians two, verse 11 says, in him also, you were circumcised with a circumcision, not made, made without hands by putting off the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ. God started it as a physical symbol showing the putting off of the flesh. But it's a spiritual mark on the heart.

[14:49] Our lives are to be marked by the spirit. How did Simon become Peter the rock? How did Saul, the Christian killer, become Paul, the preacher? Because 2 Corinthians 5, 17 says, therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he's a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come. Friend, if you're a child of God, you are to be marked by the spirit of God in your life. You are made new in the Lord. And it must reflect our lives. We also are marked, our lives are marked by faithfulness. God said in verse 9, as for you, you keep your covenant. Keep their means to watch it, to preserve it, to have charge of it. In other words, take it seriously. [15:50] Be faithful. I mean, it's easy to serve him on the mountaintop, and it's easy to smile your way through, and shallow yourself out, and just fake it.

Richard Foster, in celebration of discipline, says, superficiality is the curse of our age. No, God's not calling Abram, and God's not calling us to be superficial about our faith. Not at all. A life with the Lord's a long walk of a marked life. It's also a blessing. I don't want you to miss the blessing of this life that he speaks of. Let's look at a portion of it just again for just a minute. In Genesis chapter 17, verses 6 through 8, it says this. This is God talking. I will make you exceedingly fruitful. And I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. [17:07] And I will establish my covenant between you and your offspring. And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings.

And I will be their God. Five I wills in three verses. God is the one that does it. And once we dedicate ourselves to the long walk of a marked life, God is the one that does the blessing. And I will tell you, it is a blessing to you. When you commit to the long walk of a marked life before the Lord, it's a blessing to you. He went from being called Abram, a name that meant exalted father, and probably was in honor of the moon god in the pagan country in which he came from. But God changed his name to Abraham from Abram. And Abraham means the father of multitude. [18:15] And in the Hebrew, the difference in those two words are just one little letter that looks like an apostrophe.

And you pronounce it with just a breath. Instead of Abram, it was Abraham. It was the breath of God coming upon his life, marking him, and changing him. Not only will God keep his promises, but we're going to see through Abraham how a person changes when they're willing to wait on the Lord. You learn the ways of God and to discern his movement and discern his voice. You learn how to be calm in the midst of the storm. You don't worry so much about what other people think, but you worry about what God thinks. And that makes you a blessing of God. [19:31] Sarah's name was changed too.

Sarah means contentious. Sarah means that she's changed. And if you look at her testimony, you'll understand that she fulfilled her testimony. But her name was changed to mean princess. Sarah is never referred to in the New Testament. She was changed. She's referenced numerous times in the New Testament as Sarah because of her faith and because of her obedience and because of her godliness.

Again, in Genesis 17 and verse 15, it says this, And God said to Abraham, As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I'll bless her, and moreover, I'll give you a son by her. I'll bless her, and she shall become nations. [20:36] Kings of people shall come from her. Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?

And Abraham said to God, Oh, that Ishmael might live before you. And God said, No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. As for Ishmael, I've heard you. Behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall be father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation. But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year. God blessed her and her offspring and used them to further the legacy of Abraham, who is marked by his faithfulness because he was willing to walk long. Because he was willing to endure the silence, because he was committed to the Lord. And friend, today is an opportunity for commitment to the Lord.

[21:55] In Romans chapter 2, the apostle Paul refers to a circumcision of the heart. In other words, you can do all the outward things that you want to, but what really matters, however, is that our minds are on Christ.

Our hearts have been marked by our commitment to Christ, and that our souls have been saved by Christ. And if you look at your life, you need to see if that's the case. And if you've acknowledged that, praise the Lord, but if you haven't, and it's been a private decision that you've made to the Lord, then you need to publicly acknowledge that through baptism. You need to privately walk that long walk through devotion. You need to live your life faithfully through your walk. And to participate often in the Lord's Supper. Because Christ instructed us how to do it, and then instructed us to do it. However, before you ever do, the Apostle Paul made it very clear in 1 Corinthians 11, you need to be right with the Lord. [23:17] It's not a rite of passage. It's not a ceremony. It's a step of obedience. That is to be followed by those who are obedient followers of Christ.

And so I ask you today, has there ever been a time in your life where you know for certain that you have eternal life and you'll go to heaven when you die? Have you ever surrendered your life to the Lord Jesus Christ, ask Him to save you, and to cleanse you, and to change you?

Because I'm so thankful today that if that's never happened to you, I can offer that to you. Not anything from what I've done, but because of what Christ has done for you. Today is the day of salvation, and He'll save you today.

And we're going to stand in just a moment, and we're going to sing, and I'm going to ask you during that time to reflect upon your life, upon what needs to change in your life. And if you're here this morning and you've never given your heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ, that's something that needs to change.

And if you feel any pulling to that at all, it's not from you. Scripture says we're dead in our transgressions. The reality is that the Holy Spirit of God puts His hand upon us and begins to move and work in our lives, and we just need to respond to that.

[ 24 : 39 ] Now, there's more this morning that are here, and you know you're a Christian. You've nailed that down. But the reality is there's parts of your life that may not be pleasing to the Lord.

You can't honestly say, I'm right with the Lord. And I want to encourage you to get right with the Lord.

I'll always encourage that, by the way. I especially encourage it on a morning like this morning because what an opportunity for a fresh renewal and a time to do that. And I always want to give you the opportunity to do that before we ever partake in the Lord's Supper.

Get it right. Whether it's where you are, you privately lift that up before the Lord, or whether it's at this altar before the Lord, or whether it's with a pastor praying for you, either way, get it right with the Lord.

If you've made a private decision for the Lord but never made that public today, will you tell somebody about it? Let's follow through with baptism in coming days. Maybe God's drawing you into this fellowship.

[ 25 : 47 ] The important thing is, is your heart right with the Lord? He's very blunt, and it gets my attention.

In 1 Corinthians 11, when the Apostle Paul said, some of you are weak and ill and have even died from partaking of this flippantly. What's more important than eating bread and drinking juice is to know that your heart's right with the Lord.

And so confess as needed and get it right with God. With every head bowed and every eye closed this morning, I want to ask you, what is it that God would have you to do?

Be careful to follow Him and do exactly what He says. I'm going to pray, and we're going to stand, and we're going to sing.

God's speaking to your heart and life. You respond to Him in obedience. Lord Jesus, I love you, and I thank you for the love that you have for us and the clear direction that you give us through Abraham.

[ 26 : 55 ] I ask, dear God, that you'll help us to honor you with our lives today. God, you'll make our hearts right before you. Help us to confess, agree with you on the matters that may be a hindrance in our lives and to get it right.

Help us to walk in obedience, Father, in the times of commotion, in the times of silence, and in the times of opportunity. In Jesus' name, amen.