

**Sermon 03-13-22**  
**Ps 78; Gen 15:1-12, 17-18;**  
**Phil 3:17-4:1; Lu 13:31-35**  
**Abraham, Paul and Us –**

The scene in Genesis opens with Abram asking God questions about this great covenant – this suzerain (sovereign) covenant – God has made with him. So far, God has spoken and Abram has listened. But today, Abram is wondering why he is going to wind up settling his estate on Eleazar, his chief servant. Because no baby has been born. So, God takes Abram out under the night sky for an astronomy lesson. God promises Abram will have offspring as numerous as the stars. And, in that moment, God perceives that the man Abram believes him. And the Lord reckoned his faith as righteousness. Go to school on this one, Church! Our God is a covenant God. The Word of God accomplishes the work of God. God causes things to happen! Then, God ratifies the covenant promise by an unusual act of sacrifice. The Lord moves through the split carcasses of the clean animals laid out on the ground. The presence of God appeared in a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch.

This covenant ceremony indicated that if and when the vassal ruler or nation broke the covenant, the outcome would be destruction – lives cleaved in two and blood spilled. But in this ceremony, God moves down the gauntlet of the carcasses of the heifer, the goat, the ram, the turtledove and the pigeon. God is saying, “If ever I end this covenant, let it be with me as you see with these sacrifices laid out here.” How can God’s Life be forfeit? How can our great God ever spill God’s own blood? The Life of God is absolute Life – the Life of Creation. How could that life ever be snuffed out? What would bring about such a thing? What would be the ultimate outcome of such a death?

Later, John Baptist would shout to the world, “Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight!” (Mk 1:3b) Jesus was sent here to walk that path of sacrifice – and to take all authority.

And Paul, expressing hope for a congregation that in many ways was beyond hope, says, “I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you be filled with all the fullness of God.” (Phil 3:18) The Apostle calls the people to keep the covenant of God’s love in Christ. He recommends that the members of the congregation imitate him in his devotion to the Lord. The former pagans have to learn to trust in what Jesus has accomplished. Paul is writing to the church at Philippi from a Roman prison. He is not arrogantly telling his fellow Jesus-followers to imitate him, Paul. No, rather, he is urging them to regain their focus on the resurrected Christ – to move in the unity of the Holy Spirit. He does not want them to be torn apart – by condemnation – into factions that cannot reach out to the community together.

Let’s move backward in time twenty-five years or so: We find Jesus is making His way to Jerusalem – teaching and preaching and healing in the synagogues along the way. The Lord has just been speaking about ultimate things – how some will claim to know Him and to have been with Him in this life. But He will say, “I do not know where you come from; go away from me all you evildoers!” (Lu 13:27). Some Pharisees show Jesus uncharacteristic concern. They warn Him that Herod Antipas plans to kill him. He sends a strong message to the governor of Judea, calling him a fox. Jesus must get to Jerusalem, healing and teaching people as he goes. He intends to offer up His life inside the gates of Jerusalem, as the prophets have always done. But Jesus will do this once and for all! Once for all!

Then, Jesus cries out in His deep concern for the great city, Jerusalem. The loving concern of God from long ages past causes Jesus to weep and grieve for the city.

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killer of prophets,  
abuser of the messengers of God!  
How often I’ve longed to gather your children,  
gather your children like a hen,  
Her brood safe under her wings—

*(Continued on next page.)*

but you refused and turned away!  
And now it's too late: You won't see me again  
until the day you say,  
'Blessed is he  
who comes in  
the name of God.'" (Lu 13:34-35 MSG)

The Lord Jesus knows that His time is now. He is making good on what the Father has already promised. This is the divine plan all along, and the time is fulfilled. Jesus is the sacrifice.

So far, Jerusalem is missing the greatest blessing of all the generations of humanity. It will seem at first that Jesus has been destroyed just as all the prophets before Him. It breaks our Lord's heart to see it and know it. He weeps for the people He loves – who are missing the message of salvation. Why do they flee from His care?

The time of preparation – this season of Lent – culminates in the celebration of the greatest miracle of all time: Jesus Christ rising from death to New Life. I invite you to consider how long faithful believers have kept the covenants of God: from Abraham, through his children and children's children. Down to faithful Paul, who taught pagans how to live a holy life. Faith's heritage has come down to you and me. We teach those around us by Christ's example. Weep for those who cannot or will not believe in this Worthy Lamb, Jesus! May our hearts be broken by the things that break your heart, O Lord. Amen.