

January 29, 2023
The Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
Pastor Matt Duerr

The Road Less Traveled-The Corner of Covenant & Lineage

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen. It's Epiphany and Epiphany means making manifest, and that is our theme throughout this Epiphany season. Making Christ manifest through the road less traveled. The road less travelled is the Bible and in particular the Old Testament which so many people think is out of date. But it's in the Old Testament that we see from Genesis chapter one, two, and three that Christ came because of sin. Sin that Adam and Eve chose. Adam and Eve were the first of God's creation. They bought into the lie that Satan gave; did God really say that you can't eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil? He doesn't want you to eat because you would be like Him. He cast doubt on God's truth. He speaks in lies because he's the father he lies. One of the greatest lies that comes out of even today, evolution is it's all about you. After all evolution says survival of the fittest, so it's all about you, be the fittest, you'll survive.

Last week we went down the harsh truth highway. It's totally different than what is being taught in our schools today which was influenced by Jean Jacques Rosseau; that you're good you're born good, and people are basically good. And the Bible says no you're not. You're sinful, the heart is deceitful above all things, that left unchecked, that leads to violence and all sorts of sinful problems. So bad, in fact, that in just two chapters in Genesis it says man became sinful to the point that every thought of their hearts was evil. God held them accountable, and we had Noah's flood. But the flood ended with the rainbow and a covenant, I will never flood the earth again to destroy mankind. But He will come again in judgment with fire. but that opens as to the world of the covenant.

So welcome to Covenant Court and a guy named Abram. In Genesis chapter 12, we read; “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house.” Where did God want Abraham to go? To the land that I will show you. This was definitely a test of faith. Go first to a land that I'll show you once you're on the road. But it also was a question of commitment; leave three for Me. If you are really committed to me Abraham, leave your country, your kindred, your father's house, for Me. And that's one of the unique things we see in the Bible. That choice, shall we say. You know, fast forward to the gospels what do we see Peter doing? That's right, he had an opportunity three times to stand by Jesus and say, Yep I'm His disciple. But three times he denied Jesus. Go to the very end of the Bible in the Book of Revelation, what do we find? 666 when man chooses himself over God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

But getting back to it, “Go to the land of I will show you.” That's what Abraham was supposed to do. And God says, do this and I will; now pay attention very closely. You do this and I will one make of you a great nation. Second, I will bless you. Third, I will make your name great, so that, fourth, so you will be a blessing. Number five, I will bless those who bless you, and six I will curse those who curse you. And number seven, “and in you shall all the families of the earth blessed.” This is a covenant. It's a two-way promise. A two-way agreement. A two-way guarantee. Abraham is one part, or one way of the covenant and his job is to trust, to have faith, to obey, to leave his country, kindred, house.

God on the other hand well, He's going to do all seven of those things. I'm afraid that today we don't look at all seven of them. All too often, we focus on number one-I'll make of you a great nation-the promise of Israel, the country. But the next five are all specific to Abraham. I'm going to bless you, make your name great. I'm going to make you a blessing to others. I'm going to bless those who bless you. I'm going to curse those who curse you. But you put those together and you have six and they're all related to man. And in the Bible again, 6 is the number of man.

Seven on the other hand is the number of perfection. And look at number seven, “in you, not through you, but in you Abraham-all families of the earth shall be blessed. You will be a blessing to all the nations.” Something from in Abraham is going to do this. And it's his ancestor way down the line, or his progeny, way down the line Jesus. He's at the end of the covenant, of Covenant Court shall we say.

But in that covenant we now see also the first gospel message; “in you is going to come, or from in you is going to come the Messiah.” That leads us Lineage Lane. And again, Lineage Lane begins with father Abram who left everything to follow God and to follow the covenant that God made with him. He got to the Promised Land and there was a problem, there was famine. So, he went to Egypt. Oh no, another problem in Egypt, Pharaoh really liked beautiful women and Sarai, Abram's wife was drop dead gorgeous. Abram was afraid that Pharaoh would kill him because Pharaoh had this reputation of killing to get what he wanted so he and Sarah agreed that she would say he was she was his sister. And Pharaoh entered into a barter-exchange with Abram giving him all sorts of livestock, and both men and female servants. Now poor Pharaoh, didn't realize he was actually taking Abram's wife, so he takes her home and we read that, “great plagues” came on pharaoh and his family, and he was no dummy he realized; ‘gosh ever since she stepped over into my house there's been problems.’ So he goes back to Abram and says, what have you done? And Abram said, well we told you she was my sister because I thought you killed me. And so God's not happy about this and you're suffering and Pharaoh said, take her back, keep everything, go your way. Pharaoh sends him off a wealthy man.

And as he gets back to the Promised Land, he has with him in tow his nephew named Lot and this again tells us what kind of a guy Abram was. He said you know I've got all of this and you have what you have and the land is not big enough for the two of us. So, you choose, where you want to live. Well Lot looks at the Jordan River Valley, and goes well there's a river here, it's well watered, it's lush and green, and there are cities around and I'll take this. You can live in the hills where it's harder

to find grass, it's not as lush, and there's less water. And Abram says, OK.

Lot moves into Gomorrah and there arises of war between the kings of the Jordan valley and the kings of all the land around them. And all those kings together defeat the kings of the Jordan River Valley and one of the people they take away captive is Lot. Abram gets word of this musters his men together, 318 of them and it goes against all these kings and their armies. And he wins and brings Lot back. And it's then that God comes to him again and extends the covenant; "Your very own son will be your heir. Look at the sand on the seashore, it was individual grains of sand, that's how many offspring you'll have. Look up at the sky Abram, count the stars if you're even able to tell them; that's how many offspring you're going to have. And we read and he Abraham believed the Lord and He, God credited to him as righteousness.

Faith is righteousness. God credited to him, gives him his righteousness which is our second gospel message coming out of the Covenant making Christ even more manifest. We too, by faith in Jesus, are clothed in his righteousness. It's a part of the Covenant, it's part of the Old Testament it makes it manifest to us. But Abram was not perfect, and they tried to help God after all he was 86 years old. And so, he and Sarai, actually Sarai started the plan, but he had a son Ishmael through Sarai's handmaiden, Hagar.

Thirteen years later, Abram is 99 years old now, God comes to him and says, "I am, YHWH, God Almighty, El Shaddai." It is the first use of that term in the Bible. "I am God, Almighty. Walk before me and be blameless that I may make my covenant between me and you." And here is where God changes their names to Abraham and Sarah. And then He takes a little walk with Abraham, and he looks down the hill and Sodom and Gomorrah and says, "Shall I hide from my servant Abraham what I'm about to do?" The cry from that city comes up, I'm going to destroy it Abraham knows his nephew Lot lives there and so he says, LORD, what if there's 50 righteous? Far be it from you to destroy the innocent with the guilty for the sake of 50 would you save the city for the sake of 50? I'd save the city. Oh Lord far be it from you to talk to you about this but

what about 45, let's take 45 what about 40,40,30,20,10? For the sake of 10, I will not destroy the city. Unfortunately, there were only three and yet God sent angels to deliver Lot and his two daughters. His wife now she didn't really believe in God, turned back against God's command and turned into a pillar of salt. But God saved them and a year later Abraham has a son Isaac. And as Isaac grows older, we see in Genesis 22, God says to Abraham, take your son, your only son, sacrifice him to me and Abraham went to do that, but God wouldn't let him kill his son. God stopped him and gave him a ram instead.

But as we read the scripture, Abraham was fully ready to kill Isaac knowing that God had made a covenant, God would hold to his covenant and even if he killed Isaac, God would raise him up. But God didn't need to raise him up, He saved him. But He was giving us the third gospel message, the third manifestation of Jesus Christ in the Covenant. God did take His son, His only son, sacrificed Him on our behalf. Jesus did die a horrible, brutal death, but God did raise Him from the dead. And you see this is now the foundation, it's the road base for Lineage Lane that leads us to Covenant Court. The lineage is all a part of getting to that Covenant because it is a part of the Covenant.

God promised Abraham, your heir will continue in the Covenant. That was Isaac, the promise was that it would continue to Jacob; and it was promised to Jacob that it would continue through his son Judah; it was promised to Judah that it would continue to his sons till Jesse. It was promised to Jesse, it will continue through his son King David. And many generations later, through David's lineage-Joseph. We go down that lineage, we follow that, and we turn on to Covenant Court and what do we see? We still see Jesus, a lineage spanning well over 1000 years foretold in advance. Together the lineage, the covenant, with its gospel messages, make Christ manifest because He alone fulfills them both. But it doesn't end there. Next week on the road less traveled, it's called Deliverance Drive. I hope you take that journey with us.

In our Savior's Name, Amen.