

I Am El Shaddai, Walk Before Me

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Abram

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Our reading from the Scriptures is found in the book of Genesis 17. Genesis 17. The first two verses serve as our text for this evening. The last that we saw Abram or the history of Abram at the end of chapter 16, we learned that he was 86 years old. Another 13 years have passed.

1 And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. 2 And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. 3 And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, 4 As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. 5 Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. 6 And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. 7 And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. 8 And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. 9 And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. 10 This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. 11 And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. 12 And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed. 13 He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. 14 And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant. 15 And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. 16 And I will

bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her. 17 Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear? 18 And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee! 19 And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him. 20 And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation. 21 But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year. 22 And he left off talking with him, and God went up from Abraham. 23 And Abraham took Ishmael his son, and all that were born in his house, and all that were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house; and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin in the selfsame day, as God had said unto him. 24 And Abraham was ninety years old and nine, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. 25 And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. 26 In the selfsame day was Abraham circumcised, and Ishmael his son. 27 And all the men of his house, born in the house, and bought with money of the stranger, were circumcised with him.

May God bless our reading of his holy word.

The text that God gives us tonight is found in those first two verses. Let's reread them.

1 And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. 2 And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.

It is impossible for us to know whether those 13 years between Ishmael's birth and here what we read in Genesis 17 were silent to Abram, whether God did not anymore communicate with him during those 13 years. We don't know that but it would seem from Abram's reaction to fall upon his face, something that we don't read him doing previously, that it could have been rather 13 long silent years.

He had all that knowledge before, everything that he had gained in the knowledge of God previously that lived there, but it was not renewed or refreshed to him with further revelation, but now God comes to him and we only take the first two verses of this chapter because what we have is a powerful expression that God gives to Abram by which Abram is enabled to deal with and receive all the things that are going to come to him in this chapter as God continues his revelation to him as it's recorded here in Genesis 17. What he learns about God, and that's huge. It's not what he learns about himself but

what he learns about God is going to enable him to know that God will be able to bless him in such a way that he will be multiplied exceedingly.

Now remember, at this age, he is no longer capable of bearing children. He's infertile. He's past the age of that. Romans 4 tells us that he knows that his body is dead as far as his ability to conceive children. Ninety-nine, 86 he still could, 99, no more, and God comes to him and say, "I'm going to make of you an exceeding great. Your generations, kings are going to come from you, all kinds of nations proceed from you." His ability to receive that and take it and believe it is because of what God said to him here in verse 1. For him to believe that God had a relationship with him, the covenant, "I will make my covenant between me and thee." Abram, like us, knew his sinfulness, knew what he and Sarai had done with Hagar. Not a proud moment for him and yet God says, "I'm going to keep my covenant between me and thee." That, too, he could take that and receive it because he was enabled through the knowledge of who God is.

Up to this point for the last 13 years, Abram has been living in the knowledge, in his knowledge that Ishmael is the seed that God promised to give to him. Now he's going to learn, no, not Ishmael but Sarai will conceive a child by him and, again, that which enables him to receive that kind of knowledge and to go forth with it has to be because of who and what he knows God is. So that's why we took as our theme, that expression that God uses in verse 1 translated, "I am Almighty God," literally in the Hebrew, "I am El Shaddai. I am God Almighty." Then the admonition, then the responsibility that flows from being a recipient of the covenant, "Walk before my face and be thou perfect." We take that as our theme, "I Am El Shaddai, Walk Before Me."

First of all, we look at what God says of himself, "I am El Shaddai. I am Almighty God"; then secondly, we look at the fact that God commands Abram to live a certain way. There is a responsibility that flows to Abram out of the relationship that God has with him. "This is the certain way you must live before my face wholeheartedly." Then finally, we want to try to get those two thoughts and put them together and show that it's because he knows the Almighty God that he is enabled to perform that walk as God sets that before him.

So now, first, "I am Almighty God. I am El, I am God Almighty." We've spoken frequently about how we are to understand the name or the word "God." It's not just referring to a deity but the word "God" speaks of that being who possesses all attributes, every virtue, and he possesses every virtue immeasurably. His possession of that virtue cannot be weighed or measured or judged. God has every virtue infinitely. Infinitely. His power, omnipotent we call it. His knowledge, omniscience, all-knowing. But again, we're not able to measure all that God knows because God knows everything so that he has everything in front of him. We can deal with one subject, maybe two, but not many more at the same time but God possesses a knowledge of all of his elect perfectly at every given moment of our lives. He knows each one of us just as an example of how great God's knowledge is, that virtue, and he possesses this not at certain given times but he possesses them, every one of these virtues, eternally. God has never been without the knowledge of you; never been without the knowledge of Jesus Christ; never been without

the knowledge of any leaf or blade of grass in all of the earth. How much rain is falling in the Carolinas, God knows. He performs it. Everything.

God is God, that being that possesses every attribute infinitely and eternally, and he doesn't need – and this is implied in the name God – to learn of it from something or someone outside of himself. He possesses all of this within himself. He is the source of every one of those perfections and so very practically, when we have to define it a virtue or an attribute that we might be given, we first go to God. What is that virtue inside God? What does it mean that God is grace? What does it mean? You see, we have grace, God is grace. We possess love, God is love. We can gain some knowledge, God is all knowledge. He possesses everything, all of those attributes infinitely. That's what the name "God" is, all-sufficient one.

Now he adds, "I am God Shaddai, Almighty." That means that all power is his in the sense of all-sufficient. We came somewhat close to that in that last stanza we sang, "O, thou Jehovah," and then we identified him, "God of Hosts," he's the God of all the host of heaven, all the stars. He's the God of all the hosts of angels. He's the God of every host that there is whether they're hosts of armies, of men, everything. He is the God. "O, God of Hosts, what mighty one thy likeness boast." No mighty king, no human, has ever been able to compare himself to God. "What mighty one thy likeness boast, all thy works and vast designs, thy faithfulness forever shines."

The weather patterns increasingly fascinate how low pressures and high pressures affect humans, how animals can tell when there's a tornado, the drop in pressure or the increase of it so that animals and birds react before humans even know that it's coming; that all the water that is in all the world, the amount of it seems never to change, it just moves, it has different forms but it's all there. Houston got a lot when that storm settled there. Now the Carolinas receive it because the storm seems to stop there and it just falls on drenched land.

God performs everything so orderly, so beautifully. The rising of the sun, again, simple thing but they can predict what time on the clock the sun will rise in Grand Rapids, Michigan on December 31, 2021. Now I can't do that but someone can. They can. They know, and when it will rise, when it will set because the regularly with which God performs his work.

All-sufficient mighty one. No want or lack. So the word "Almighty" doesn't just refer to power but it refers to his all-sufficiency. Now, he's the one who gives and takes. "Blessed be the name of Jehovah," Job, "The Lord gives and the Lord takes." He's the one who enables every single one of us to breathe. He's the one who enables any one of us to be able to think accurately. He gives us the vision strong or weak. He orders so that even sin committed against us or by us is in his plan perfect. It's just what must happen to that individual or that group of people. A death of a young person impacts so many with purpose for each one that's exactly right.

"I am El Shaddai." Fourteen years before in Genesis 15, God came to Abram and said, "Fear not, I am thy shield, thy exceeding great reward." That God who identified himself that way to Abram now identifies himself as the one who can keep every promise. In chapter 12, verse 2, "I will make of thee a great nation. I will bless thee and make thy name great and thou shalt be a blessing." In chapter 13, verse 16, "I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth so that if any man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered." In chapter 15, "Look now toward heaven, tell the stars if thou be able to number them, so shall thy seed be." That God, El Shaddai, is the one who is able to keep his promise. That's what he's shouting at Abram and at us.

The Promiser is not bound by time and that's what made Abram so conscious of it. When God first came, he was like us, "Okay, let's do it. Let's go now." And God waited and Abram said, "Well, maybe God isn't going to keep that promise." So he had to help God, he thought, with Hagar and Ishmael and he believed it for 13 years. "We did it! We helped God." And now God's going to come to him and say, "No, not Ishmael. Sarah who has never been able to have a child and you now infertile, you're going to have a child at this set time next year." We can't. "Oh? I can." That's the way God wants Abram and us to think. "I am able. I am El Shaddai. I made the promise. I am able to keep that promise and to fulfill it. The sufficiency and the power is mine." The all-sufficient, mighty God. "Whatever I promise, I'm able to keep." How many promises has God given us in the Scriptures? How many promises don't we individually have? "I am with you. I will never leave you. When you go through the fire and the water, I will bring you through. Fear not." You think your hand is free? He's got it. He holds it and he won't let go. No matter how hard we pull back, he has our hand.

So when God comes to Abram and already said to him in verse 18 of chapter 15, "In the same day Jehovah made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land." Now he comes again and he says, "I will make my covenant between me and thee." That intimate covenant life which is really one life, God sharing his life with us. Just as those animals had one life, so God shares his life with us. We spoke of that this morning. Our ability to believe, our ability to know him is because he shares his life with you. How many in all the world don't know him? You do. He's made his covenant with you.

Now he repeats that promise. That covenant that God establishes lays upon Abram a responsibility. That responsibility God immediately presents to him. "Walk before me. Be thou perfect." What did we learn? Well, before we explain and try to understand what those words mean, let's back up a minute and realize what characterizes those to whom God gives this command, and it is an imperative, it is an admonition, it is a commandment. "Walk before me. Be thou perfect." What characterizes those who get this command? Well, first, sort of obvious but let's be very clear: God does not issue that to a book, he doesn't issue it to a tree, he doesn't issue it to a building, he doesn't issue it to any of the other of God's creatures except to men, to humans, to humans that he created in his own image and likeness; to humans to whom he gave a mind and a will and a morality. We call it a rational moral creature. We're able to reason. We're able to have a will of what to do or not to do. We have a sense of right and wrong. Morality.

But now let's go further. God gives a command to every human in Adam, "Obey me," and the heart of obedience is, "Love me. Do what I command. Eat of this tree, that tree, this tree, that tree, not that one, but all the others you may eat. Obey me." Adam exercising his will and his sense of right and wrong as he looked at his wife and he disobeyed. He didn't love God with all of his heart, mind, soul and strength. He chose, he exercised his will to disobey him. He wanted to take for himself the right to determine, "This is right, that's wrong." Not what God said, "That's legitimate for me too. I want that tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." In doing that, Adam brought upon himself and all of his seed the judgment of God and that judgment of God said, "Now you cannot obey me. You are incapable. You still retain a rationality and a morality but it's so perverted and twisted," those words are iniquities and transgressions, "you have rebelled consciously against me purposefully and as a result, none of you are capable anymore of ever obeying me."

Then third, in a display of the might of his love, God gave to undeserved ones a renewed relationship. Not all. Not all were grafted into Christ, only some, the ones he chose, he selected, and to them he gave the ability to obey. He renewed them. He softened their heart. He turned their will. Before stubborn and hard and he softened it. He gave us a renewed sense of right and wrong as we knew him accurately.

But when God comes to us and he says, "Walk before me and be thou perfect," while we are now able, many are not able, we are able, it's not an automatic thing. Okay, we've got it now, we can do it. No, because within us is still that old man and that new man and there's the battle. Yes, we know what's right and what's wrong and that's what makes the sins that we commit far worse than those who are not able. We are able to love him and obey him.

We experience the wonder of justification. God declares to us that he has made us righteous in Christ and he's forgiven all of our sins. He declares to us that he has imparted to us as well as imputed to us the perfect righteousness of Jesus. He's blotted out all of our imperfections and he's imputed to us all the perfections of Jesus so that we stand before him as perfectly righteous, perfect in God's sight. We're able and that's when he comes to us and he says, "Because of this relationship, I want you to know that you're able and this is a greater calling on your part."

The reprobate are called to do what's right, they're commanded. They stand before him and they refuse because they can't obey. We can and what God sets before us is this, taking the last part first: be thou perfect. Now right away the word "perfect" is no longer used the way the Bible used it. We use the word "perfect" to be sinless and that's not the meaning. The word "perfect" means literally "whole or complete" and the idea in this command is be sincere. Literally it's translated elsewhere "wholehearted." That's why we sang from song 304, "O, give the Lord wholehearted praise. To him thanksgiving I will bring."

Wholehearted when we pray. How many times have we prayed today? How many times have we folded our hands and closed our eyes in prayer? How many times in those prayers was it wholehearted? Even fathers as we led in prayer at the table, we know how to say the same words or the same phrases and we've got the words but is the heart sincerely behind the words? How many stanzas did we sing tonight? Did we sing understandingly? When we recited the Apostles' Creed, "I believe. I believe. I believe." We can do it without even thinking, especially when we're in a group.

"Be thou sincere." And God comes to us knowing we have the ability to be sincere but knowing the difficulty that's ours because of the presence of that old man. So he stands before us and he doesn't, "Well, I understand so that's okay. At least you went through the motions." No. He is not worthy, worthy of half-hearted, worthy of just the words, worthy of just going to church. He's worthy of sincerity. He's worthy of wholehearted praise. Be aware of his worthiness to receive only dedicated devotion.

That's what El Shaddai, "I am Almighty God, God Almighty. Be thou sincere." Then the way that helps us to do that is, "Walk before me." Literally, "Walk before my face. Live," there's that second part of the three steps of the fear of Jehovah and that second one is expressed this way: a pervasive awareness of his presence. A pervasive awareness of God's presence.

Be aware of God's face. He's watching. That's one side, he's watching. He's watching. I've given you the example of the man who only became sorry about his watching pornography when his wife caught him but he didn't seem to be concerned about the fact that his God saw him all the time. How about all of us? Not with pornography but with anything. Walk before his face.

He's watching but now the other side is just as true. Do you know what the face of God is toward you because he's established and makes this relationship called the covenant? He's not frowning. He's not checking. He's the God whose face is shining in approval and favor and he makes his face to shine upon us. He lifts up the light of his countenance upon us. He's always showing to us nothing but his love for his children. That's the way he looks at us.

Be aware. You see, we can do what's right because we're scared he's going to check on us but that's not the right way. The right way is we're going to do his will out of love for him because we see his love for us. Walk before that face that is expressing his care and his concern for his beloved children and then we'll do what is right. Be aware of how much he cares. Do that right now and the more we do it in the normal, the better we're going to be able to do it when all of a sudden he comes and he really knocks and he wants our attention and he takes a life, or we're in tremendous physical pain, or our emotions are really straining and we're depressed and discouraged and everything seems to be dark. Walk before his face. Know what God's face has on it as he looks at the children that he's redeemed in the blood of his own Son.

It's love and it's only love and it's always love, undeserved grace. It's always the desire to bless, mercy. Boundless mercy. Immeasurable undeserved love and favor, that's his face toward you. That's how he looks at you. Don't doubt. That's what he says, "I establish my covenant with you. Between me and thee." And when he speaks to Abram and he calls him "thee," he's speaking to Abram specifically, that individual person, and that's the way he speaks to all of us. With you. And with you. And with you. Old, young. "I establish my covenant, I make my relationship of love with you." Now walk before that face.

Live in the consciousness of God being with you, God having a tender love for you, of God being able to direct everything that happens in our life from a raindrop falling on our head to a cracked tooth, from a car wreck to a tummy ache. Everything. He works out of that attitude of love, out of that relationship.

To know that about God, it's one thing to be in awe. As a child or a teenager, I stood at the rim of the Grand Canyon in such a mammoth, mammoth canyon, to see the Canadian Rockies and it seems that the further north you go on the Rocky Mountain chain, the more magnificent they become, and to see how awesome they are as a work of the Creator. I'll never forget seeing one huge mountain with all of the lines in it, all the layers on a 45 degree angle as if God just ripped it up in the flood and set it on that angle and he displays it, "Look at what I did in the flood." Huge mountain.

"I am El Shaddai. I am able to make everything work together for your good. I am Almighty God." A baby born, what is that to God? A baby dying, he is able to make it work. Know that God that way so we're aware of his seeing and delighting in us. When we by faith know God as he's given us Christ's perfect work for us, and we know that we're righteous before him by faith, then in the way of our confessing our sins and our sinfulness and our cleaving to him, then we know that our focus is on him so we can admire with awe the greatness of the hand of God as the Creator. But there is that expression in the Canons, to be awed at the depths of his mercy; to adore the exact words are, to adore the depths of his mercies. It's one thing to be able to, "Yup, okay, I get it. That sure is amazing." But to adore the depths of his mercy.

Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners and I am the chief. What a God. Walk before that face and live your life in that consciousness and then when he says, "I am able to make everything in your life for good, everything. You think you've got a relationship and a marriage that's not very good, you're struggling, I am able. You think your sins are so horrible and so great that you're not worthy, you're right but that's not a hindrance to me. I am Almighty God. You think you can't get to heaven? You can't on your own but I am able. I am able to do exceeding abundantly above all you ask or think. I am able. I am God Almighty."

The ungodly when faced with the prospect of Jesus' return cry for the hills and the mountains to cover them. Those who know this God are able to believe that when he says, "I have a relationship with you and with your seed after you," we say, "If you say so. I believe it." Ninety-nine and 100 and 90 and able to have a son? "If you say so."

That's your God. That's your God. That's the one who has established a relationship, "I will make my covenant between me and thee."

Yes, there's the fear that we always have about what other people think, there's the knowledge of our inabilities, there's the knowledge of what others we live as before their face. No, live before his. Be thou perfect. Render to him sincere wholehearted thanksgiving and praise. What a God! Amen.

Great and mighty one, please, we beg of thee perform thy work of taking words that we mumble and stutter about trying to give expression to a greatness that is beyond our minds to conceive, take it, Father, as only thou art able, and impress it upon us that we will live in that consciousness now, this week, and all the rest of our life secure, comforted, amazed at such love, the power of such love. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Genesis 17:1
I AM EL SHADDAI, WALK BEFORE ME

- I. The Almighty God.
 - A. "I am the Almighty God (El Shaddai).
 - 1. "El" is the most common name of God, identifying Him as the Being who has every perfection infinitely and eternally.
 - 2. "Shaddai" means almighty and all powerful in the sense of all-sufficient; the Mighty One.
 - B. He who identified Himself as Abram's shield (exceeding great reward) now identifies Himself as able to keep every promise.
 - 1. Twenty-four years after receiving God's promise to make of him a great nation (12:2a; 13:16), Abram is told again.
 - 2. The reason is because the Promiser is El Shaddai, the All-sufficient Mighty One!
- II. The covenant, established and constantly realized by God alone, gives the responsibility of new obedience.
 - A. What is it about those with whom God establishes His covenant?
 - B. "Be thou perfect."
 - 1. This Hebrew word means to be complete or whole in the sense of being sincere or wholehearted. Not mean to be sinless.
 - 2. It is to serve God sincerely, with an undivided heart, i.e., serving God and mammon at the same time.
 - C. "Walk before Me," i.e., before God's face.
 - 1. Live every moment in the consciousness of God being with you and God knowing all we think, say, and do.
 - 2. It is a relationship in which you are in awe of Him, your pride is broken, and you are irresistibly drawn by His grace/love.
- III. It is the knowledge of El Shaddai which is the foundation of our being able to obey in this covenant-friendship.
 - A. But those who rightly know Almighty God see Him able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think.
 - B. The possibility of walking before God and the possibility of believing that God would fulfill His promises rests on knowing God.
 - C. Then my thoughts, words, and actions are done as before His face.