**WALK BEFORE ME**

Genesis 17:1-27 (Key verse 1)

*“When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless.”*

In today’s passage we are going about God who came to Abraham to reaffirm his covenant with him and helped him to walk before him faithfully and blamelessly. How did God do this? The key verse says the Lord first came to him and said to him: **“I am God Almighty (El-Shaddai)”,** therefore through today’s passage we are going to dissect in detail the meaning of the identity that God revealed to Abraham, and how it could help him to walk before the Lord. We are also going to learn what it means to walk before the Lord faithfully and blamelessly.

After God had revealed his identity to Abram and helped him to walk before the Lord, he revisited his covenant with him, and changed his name from Abram to Abraham, and changed Sarai’s name to Sarah. Therefore, through today’s passage were also going to learn the meaning of the name change, and the impact it had in Abraham in the reaffirmation of his covenant with God. I pray that the Lord may have mercy on us to receive one word today, so that we too can walk before the Lord faithfully and blamelessly.

The passage today begins with the Lord appearing to Abram. Why did the Lord appear to Abram, where and when? Let us look at **verse 1** our **key verse**: “*When Abram was* *ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless.”* The Lord appeared to Abram when he was ninety-nine years old, this is about 13 years since Hagar gave birth to Ishmael. As we learnt in the previous passage, when Hagar was pregnant with Ishmael after Sarai gave her to her husband saying, “*Perhaps I can build a family through*”, Hagar despised Sarai and caused a lot of trouble in Abram’s family. Sarai mistreated her and she fled, and the Lord appeared to her and commanded her to return to her mistress and restored the peace in Abram’s household.

Even though God blessed Hagar, and restored the peace in Abram’s family, it was very clear that Ishmael was the son of the flesh, and not the Son of the promise of God. And for the whole 13 years Abram must have worried much, even though he loved Ishmael and enjoyed watching him grow as baby, toddler and now teenager, he worried about having the son of the promise. He worried about Sarai who remained childless, who might still have been angry with Abram and Haggai. Abram worried about having the son of the promise through his wife Sarai. Are you in a situation of worry about your life, waiting for the Lord to answer you, to fulfil his promise to you? To bless you in your job, academic career, ministry, marriage or family?

When Abram was in a state of worry, the Lord appeared to him. The Lord appearing to Abram was a sign of love for Abram, how he valued him and desire to restore him so that he can live each day without a heavy heart, worry, regret and unsettled issues. What did the Lord do when he appeared to Abram? The Lord said to Abram: **I am God Almighty**, in Hebrew that is **El-Shaddai**. Abram was in some form of crisis, filled with worries, unresolved issues and the first thing that God did when he appeared to him was to reveal his identity. He did not try to change Abram’s situation, but rather he revealed his identity to him, his person and character. Yes, getting our crisis and issues to go away is important, but what is most important first and for most is knowing who God is, his person and character.

I am God Almighty, what does this mean? This emphasized God's supreme power, omnipotence, and sovereignty over all creation. This means God is all-sufficient, he is the God who pours out blessings, who gives richly, abundantly and continually. He is the God who has everything in his hand. He is the God who is merciful. He is the God who is able to fulfill his promise, meaning there is no need for Abram to give up on the promise of God, there is no need for Abram to worry for God is Almighty, everything is in his hands. This is how God wanted Abram to see him, this is how God wants us to see him. When we know this about God, we are able to overcome our worries and continue to live by faith and wait on the Lord. The way we live our lives of faith is determined by what we think of God. If our God is El-Shaddai, God Almighty, then our lives will live out the fullness of God's promises to us. Any view of God less than the God Almighty will shrink our soul and neutralize our faith and fill us with worries and fear.

Furthermore, the Lord said to Abram: “*Walk before me faithfully and blamelessly*”. After revealing his identity, the Lord commanded Abram to walk before him, again he did not resolve his problem. But commanded him to walk before him, what does this mean? This means to have faith in God, to have relationship with God, not just one time believing his word and promises, but daily walking with God, having faith in him and putting our trust in him daily. Faithfully meaning, having a relationship with him daily without fail. Blamelessly means whole, so God wants us to walk with him with our full being, full commitment and not partially. God wants us to persevere, and remain in him, overcome temptations to put our trust in other things, our strength, powerful figures of this world. In **John 15:4** Jesus said: “*Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.”* In order to experience the power of God, to be used by God, overcome our challenges and produce fruit we need to remain in Jesus, walk before him faithfully and blamelessly.

After God had revealed his identity and character as El-Shaddai and had commanded Abram to walk before him faithfully and blamelessly, he revisited the covenant he had with Abram in **verse 2** saying: “*2 Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.”* God is faithful, his covenant and promise to Abram remained, he repeated it here to re-affirm it to Abram, he repeated it to help Abram to live with it daily. In order for Abram to have the covenant of God he needed to know the identity of God, he needed to walk before God faithfully and blamelessly. When we do not know who God is, we cannot walk before him faithfully and blamelessly and subsequently we cannot live in his covenant. Knowing who God is and walking before God will help Abram overcome his worries and enable him to live by faith in the promise of God.

After God had appeared to him, revealed his identity and commanded him to walk before him, Abram fell face down. Abram falling face down shows reverence towards God, it showed honor and praise to God, it showed repentance and submission to God, it showed obedience and acceptance that indeed God is Almighty, acceptance, willingness and faith to walk before God faithfully and blamelessly. Abram was ready to throw away everything, throw away trusting in his own strength, throw away all worries and put his full trust in the Lord. I pray that God may have mercy on us too, to throw away everything, all worries about our work, studies, family, marriage and many others and put our trust in God Almighty.

When God saw Abram’s faith and submission to his command, he revealed to him more the measure of his covenant. Let us look at **verses 4-8**:

*4 “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. 5 No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. 6 I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. 7 I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. 8 The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.”*

Here God Almighty revealed to Abram that he would be father of many nations. This was something that Abram could not see with his eyes. It was a long term promise that God gave him and to help him to hold onto this promise God Almighty changed his name from Abram (meaning Father of many), to Abraham (which means father of many nations). Even though Abraham could not see this with his own eyes, in God Almighty's eyes it had already been done. Abraham had to live by faith to hold onto this promise, to see it and know that it was already as good as done, because God Almighty said so. This was not positive thinking this was simply accepting God's covenant promise.

This covenant was not for Abraham alone. What God Almighty was promising to Abraham was not just to solve his individual and personal matter. God Almighty was establishing an everlasting covenant, a covenant that would continue even after Abraham, it was to go to his descendants after him. This was always God's great purpose and plan. Abraham originally saw the promise of God for himself, that he would have a son; that God Almighty would be his God. But God had in mind that He would in turn be the God of Abraham's son Isaac and his sons after him and so on, until our very day. God’s concern is not only to solve our matters today, but to solve our descendants worries and challenges, to establish a covenant with them to know him and to walk before him. As a father, I tend to worry about the future of my daughter, what will happen when I can no longer be able to take care of her, but today I am comforted by the covenant of God that extends even to her, to everlasting.

Furthermore, God commanded Abraham to keep the covenant, just as God promised to keep his covenant. In **verse 10-12** it says: “*10 This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. 11 You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. 12 For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring.”* Abraham was to keep his covenant through circumcision. This circumcision was a permanent sign cut into the very flesh of every male. This sign could not be removed or undone. This sign was also not just a matter of the flesh; it is not merely outward or physical.

In **Romand 2:29** it says: “*No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person’s praise is not from other people, but from God.*” True circumcision is not a matter of outward services, but a matter of the heart, a matter of unseen things. We can do many outward things and deceive others or even ourselves, but God looks and judges the heart. When Cain and Abel gave sacrifices, God looked with favor on Abel's offering, but not with Cain's offering. It was because Abel made his offering from a circumcised heart, a heart of gratitude and thankfulness to God; Cain gave out of obligation and to look good and gave nothing truly valuable or meaningful. God judged each man's heart. In order to keep our covenant with God, and experience the promises of God even when nothing is happening around us, we need to circumcise our hearts, through reverence, repentance, the study of God’s word and obedience, walk before God faithfully and blamelessly. Then by God’s mercy we will see the power of God, God almighty.

After God had commanded Abraham to keep his covenant, he further revisited his covenant. Let us look at **verse 15-16**: “*15 God also said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. 16 I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.”* Here God changed Sarai’s name which meant my Princess, to Sarah which means Princess, Sarai was Princess for Abraham, but Sarah was Princess for the world, a mother of many nations. God did not only bless Abraham to be a father of many nations, but Sarah too, through Sarah’s offspring, God will establish many nations, kings of people will come through her. The covenant was not just for Abraham, but for Sarah too. Just as God used Abraham mightily, God used Sarah mightily, God continues to use our shepherdess and sisters mightily today. I am always amazed by Shepherdess Rebekah, how she raised us both spiritually and physically, she fed us with delicious food and powerful words of God. In her, I could see and understand what it means that God raised Sarah as a mother of many nations.

**Conclusion:**

From today’s passage we have learnt that for us to keep the promise and covenant of God and experience the promise of God, we need to know who God is, his identity. When God appeared to Abram he said: “**I am God Almighty**” emphasizing his supreme power, omnipotence, and sovereignty over all creation. He is the all-powerful, all-sufficient God, He has everything in his hand, He is merciful, He pours out blessings, He gives richly and abundantly continually. He is the God who is able to fulfill his promise. We have also learnt that in response of the identity and character of God, we also need to walk before God faithfully and blamelessly in order to keep the covenant of God. I pray that God may help us to study his word diligently, know who God is deeply, have a relationship with him, circumcise our hearts, obey God, revere him and praise him like our Father Abraham.