

Jul 16, 2016

**Genesis 17:1-27**  
*The Genesis of God's People:*  
*A Conditional Sign of Unconditional Grace*  
Jonathan M. Romig  
CornerstoneWestford.com

\*In service, read Genesis 17:1-14.

Introduction: **(Slide#1)**

1. When I was in home town of Estes Park Colorado on vacation, I visited my old job, Indian Village. **(S#2)**
2. It has neon green street lights, bars in the windows, and is full of jewelry, t-shirts, and toy ponies.
3. I like visiting to see my old friends and to see what's new—I've bought many things over the years.
4. On this most recent trip, I picked up a t-shirt with the Colorado flag colors on it.
5. I wanted a reminder of my family, my friends, and the place I grew up.
6. When I went to purchase this item and several others, my boss wouldn't let me pay for them.
7. She gave them to me as a gift to remind me of how much she cares for me.
8. In that moment, my boss showed unconditional grace to me—she gave me a gift I didn't deserve.
9. We all need to receive unconditional grace in our lives, and then we need reminders of that grace.
10. In the Bible, God gives us unconditional grace and then gives us signs to remind us of his grace.

(This summer we're studying through the book of Genesis, and most recently, the story of Abram/Abraham.)  
(We're going to review God's unconditional grace in Gen 15 and then a sign of that grace in Gen 17.)

- I. God promises unconditional grace to those who believe. (Genesis 15) **(S#3)**
  - A. God gave an unconditional covenant of grace to Abram. **(S#4-7>)** (Terry's 15min joke...)
    1. *What is a covenant? An elected, family-like relationship, of obligation, under divine sanction.*
      - a) **Elected:** established beyond blood ties (Fatima/Morocco and Luis/Peru make agreement)
      - b) **Obligation:** binding contract or promise (home mortgage, car loan, publishers contract)
      - c) **Divine Sanction:** God oversees the agreement (marriage ceremony, declaration of intent)<sup>1</sup>
      - d) Or you can define covenant the easy way... **A promise where God is involved. (S#8)**
      - e) The Cornerstone leadership team put together a covenant for members.
    2. What is the unconditional covenant of grace given to Abram?
      - a) God promises **1) place, 2) people, 3) presence. (S#9)** (cf. Gen 15:4, 22:17)

**(S#10) Genesis 12:1–3** 1 The Lord had said to Abram, “**Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you (Place = Canaan).** 2 “**I will make you into a great nation (Jews + Gentiles), and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.** 3 **I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse (God will be with you!); and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”** (NIV®)

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<sup>1</sup> Definition by Dr. Gordon Hugenberger, Pastor of Park Street Church Boston, MA, and sub-definitions adapted from Dr. Donna Petter, Director of the Hebrew Language Program and Associate Professor of Old Testament at GCTS.

- b) Genesis 12 lays the foundation of the covenant and in Genesis 15 God seals the deal.
- c) Abram only does one thing to receive this unconditional covenant of grace... **he has faith.**

**(S#11) Genesis 15:6** Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness. (NIV®)

- d) Because of Abram’s faith, not his works, God grants him holiness, an undeserved gift.
- e) At the end of chapter 15, God ratifies this promise by passing between animals cut in half.
- f) His presence is a “smoking firepot with a blazing torch” and the split animals are a curse.
- g) He’s saying, “May what happened to these animals happen to me if the covenant is broken.”<sup>2</sup>

(God gave an unconditional covenant of grace to Abram.)

(Did you know that he also offers it to us? What was true for Abram can be true for you.)

B. God promises unconditional grace to those who believe in Jesus. **(S#12)**

1. The night before Jesus was betrayed he celebrated passover with his disciples.
2. He said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.” (Luke 22:20b)
3. Jesus came along and instituted a new covenant that is the fulfillment of Abram’s covenant.
4. In Jesus, all the promises to Abram are realized (Gal 3:16).
  - a) **Place**—he is the way, the truth, and the life that leads us to Aslan’s country (John 14:6).
  - b) **People**—Jesus makes possible the way of salvation for every type of people (Rev 7:9).
  - c) **Presence**—Jesus is God with us, God in the flesh, God incarnate (Matt 1:23).
5. Through Jesus, God is offers a place we can experience true relationship with God and others.
6. All we do to receive this gift is to trust Jesus, to have faith, to believe.

**(S#13) John 3:16** For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (NIV®)

(Most of us aren’t used to receiving anything unconditionally... not grace, not love, not anything.)

C. In Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, there is a Museum of Broken Relationships. (Visited in 2013)

1. At the museum there’s a damaged garden dwarf thrown at a leaving lover’s windshield. **(S#14-16)**
2. There is a small box made of matches given to a woman on her wedding day (at 18 years he left).
3. And there is “a shiny new axe (used to splinter the furniture of an ex-lover one item per day).”
4. We believe in a God who doesn’t break relationships—he offers unconditional grace.
5. Jesus is completely counter-cultural... God loves you unconditionally.
6. How might you extend unconditional love and grace to others? (accept each other)

(All the trinkets in the museum were signs of conditional grace, but we need a different sign.)

II. God gives a sign of unconditional grace to every believer (Genesis 17) **(S#17)**

A. The covenant sign given to Abram was **circumcision**. **(Read Gen 17:5, 9-11)**

1. Circumcision is the cutting off of the male foreskin. **(S#18)**
2. In many ancient cultures, it was given to boys around the age of 13 to prove their manhood.

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Archeological Study Bible: The Hittite Ritual of Passing Between the Pieces of a Sacrifice. Jeremiah 34. Page 1251.

3. It symbolized power and fertility... but Abram is 99 and Sarah is 90, they can't reproduce!
4. God renames Abram to Abraham (sounds like "father of a multitude") to illustrate the promise.
5. The sign of circumcision is a deeply personal reminder that God is going to do it.

(We too need reminders that God has done it all for us.)

(When Monica and I were dating, I bought her a turquoise ring to remind her of my love.)

(Every time she wore it, she thought about Estes Park, the time we were dating, and me.)

(God gives Christians a reminder of his love for them... he gives us the Lord's Supper... and...)

B. The covenant sign given to all who believe in Jesus is **baptism**. (S#19)

1. The Lord's supper is also a sign of the new covenant with Jesus, but we're focusing on baptism.
2. The new covenant isn't for a specific ethnic people, but for anyone who believes in Jesus.

(S#20) Acts 2:38 Peter replied, "**Repent and be baptized**, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (NIV®)

3. Baptism symbolizes our death, burial, and resurrection with Jesus Christ (Rom 6:3-4, Col 2:12).
4. Your baptism is a powerful reminder to you that you have received God's unconditional grace.
5. God gives you baptism as a powerful reminder, have you received the gift? (don't deny yourself)
6. If you haven't been baptized, I encourage you to come to tonight's baptism class (free pizza).

(The covenant sign given to Abraham was circumcision and one of those given to us is baptism.)

(God gives a sign of unconditional grace to every believer.)

(God gives us these reminders to not just make us feel good, but to transform our lives.)

III. Unconditional grace marks and transforms every believer. (Gen 17:1-2) (S#21)

A. The covenant sign of circumcision comes with a command to obey. (Read Gen 17:1-2)

1. God seems to tell Abraham, if you disobey, you won't receive the promised blessing. (cf. v. 9)
2. Is God replacing an unconditional covenant of grace (ch15) with a conditional covenant (ch17)?
3. No! God is pointing to a much deeper truth... God is pointing to the **Gospel**.
4. God says, "be blameless" or "be faultless... be perfect... be without defect" (like spotless lamb).
5. But nobody can or ever has lived a blameless life... except for one... Jesus Christ. (=condition)
6. In Genesis 17, God is saying, "If you disobey me, I will curse you." (Deut 28:15).
7. But In Genesis 15, God said, "I love you no matter what... AND..."<sup>3</sup>
8. When God passed thru the animals he is saying, "I will take the curse if you break my covenant."
9. Jesus is the God who came to take the curse for us (Gal 3:13)... Jesus was cut to make us whole.
10. In Jesus, those worthless are made worthy and the guilty are made blameless.

(Are you marked by grace?)

(Unconditional grace marks and transforms every believer.)

(God has marked you... do you see it?)

B. At our last baptism service Heathyr and Derrick showed their marks of grace.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Gordon Hugenberger, "The Seed of Abraham" Genesis 17 sermon. December 10, 2000 <http://www.parkstreet.org/library/sermons/scripture/Genesis-17> (accessed 7.13.2016)

1. Heathyr and her family have been through some incredibly tough times.
2. God took Heathyr out of unhealthy relationships and is giving her Jesus.
3. Derrick grew up in a church that taught him he had to be blameless to please God.
4. Not until he was in his late 20s did he learn Jesus makes him blameless.
5. What's your story? Come and get your mark of grace in baptism.
6. If you've already been baptized, I encourage you to write your Faith Story.
7. It will help you remember the ways God has shown you unconditional grace.

Conclusion:

1. At Cornerstone, our vision is “**a gospel-centered church that changes lives through sharing the message of Jesus Christ in word and deed.**”
2. At Cornerstone, we want to see people's lives changed by Jesus.
3. Baptism is one of the clearest ways we get to publicly see God's transformation.
4. The call of Genesis 15 and 17 is a call to have not just a good or obedient life, but a changed life.
5. God can heal any hurt... he can mend any wound... he can change any person.
6. Through the gospel, Jesus transforms broken people into blameless people.
7. Unconditional grace marks and transforms every believer.

**2 Peter 3:18** But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen. (NIV®)