

Passing Our Kingdom Inheritance to Heirs as Numerous as the Stars based on Gen. 15:1-17, D. Jahnke, 11/1/15

Abraham was sent on a journey from his homeland to a new land where he prospered. But he was getting on in age and he did not have a child to pass his inheritance onto. He and his wife had been literally barren so their life felt barren. And barrenness led them to fear the future. Death was approaching and they had no children to carry on their genes and their wealth.

God told Abraham to not be afraid because God was their shield and reward. And God would provide them with a child.

We have been called to a promised land and we have been blessed with prosperity while on that journey. But we also experience barrenness. We have all that we need but the modern world makes us wonder what it is all about and why it matters.

So when God tells Abraham that he will have his own child, God is saying that earthly fruitfulness and rewards are important. At the same time, God is expanding Abraham's horizons when he tells him that He, God, will ultimately be his reward and shield; and that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars in heaven.

Jesus makes clear what God is suggesting to Abraham. When Jesus speaks of rewards, he says that those who have rewards on earth but do not share them are in danger of not having rewards in the life to come. At the same time, those who do not have many earthly rewards but trust in God's promises will be richly rewarded in the fullness of time. [Matthew 5-6] And when Jesus talks about family, he says that anyone who follows him is his mother and brother and sister.

All of this meant that Jesus was on his way to a promised land where our reward will not be a nice plot of land with a white picket fence and a few kids running around. Our reward will be God himself. And all God's children will be our family. The land will have no fences and we will have an eternity to explore the most beautiful places we can possibly imagine.

Not it's hard is hard for the modern mind to accept and believe in some other world or that this world will be completely made new. But it was also hard for the elderly Abraham and Sarah to believe they would still have their own child. But Abraham did believe this and God considered and made Abraham righteous because of it.

Now don't get hung up on this word righteous. Don't confuse it with being self-righteous or arrogant. Righteousness simply means that things are right and orderly in one's life and one's body. Paul talks about the righteousness-making of God. And how a growing trust in God's ability to make things right in God's time brings God's righteousness into our lives.

This week is Reformation Sunday. A couple of things in Martin Luther's life are relevant for today's sermon. The first is that he was brought to a point of barrenness in his life through his sense that he was not good enough. Luther felt chronic guilt and eventually despair at not being able to live up to Jesus' standards.

But then he rediscovered Paul's letter to the Galatians which taught him that only God could justify or make things right. Luther then looked at Jesus anew and saw someone who was always full of love and mercy and healing toward sinners. Luther's return to God's Word and the Mercy at the heart of that word allowed him to rise up out the barrenness of depending on his own broken self.

Another parallel to Abraham is how God took Luther on a journey of faith that led to a complete transformation of the society around him. God's Word to Luther taught him about God's power to speak to every individual who opens up their hearts and their Bibles. And just as Abraham's trust led to the formation of God's people, Luther's led to their re-formation in the 16th century. A reformation which has led billions to personally explore the scriptures and prayer and a relationship with God. So what might our renewed trust in the Word of God lead to? A Word through study, prayer and through the most practical and tangible means, directly from the people of God?

It is testimony time in the church season so I have a couple of testimonies from this last week which started off very barren for me, personally and vocationally. And my first help came from studying God's Word in small groups.

But the barrenness persisted and led to my first bad night of sleep in quite some time. And as the demons of the dark went on the attack, I fell to my knees and started praying. I remembered how Abraham was blessed for believing God and his asking God how he would know that things would be all right. And I pled for the same assurance. I was then flooded with God's Presence for the first time in a long time. I laid back down with everything in a new light and I fell back to sleep.

So I received help from prayer in addition to small group discipleship. I implore you to start praying. You may not have dramatic religious experience but almost all saints in Christian history testify to a deeper awareness of the presence and power of God through the practice of prayer.

But even prayer did not completely get rid of my malaise. So I went running the other day, expecting my mood to be lifted as almost always happens...and while the endorphins were flowing and the colors were vibrant around me, there was no change. Part of the problem may have been that it was a nice sunny day when I started my run about 5 p.m. in shorts and a t-shirt. And by the time I was half-way through, the sun was down, the wind was up and the temperature had dropped probably ten degrees.

The last few blocks, I threw myself upon the mercy of the Lord for the second time, asking for help. And when I got back to our cul-de-sac, my Baptist neighbor was pulling out. He stopped and rolled down his window and after greeting each other he said, "What I love about you is you run the race set before you. You may not always end up in first, but you finish the race."

I could not believe how fast God answered my prayer. And I know I do not deserve it but I am so grateful. Because the world places so much value on winning and success. But at the end of the race, only Jesus wins. And our job is to keep pressing forward in following Jesus to the finish line—trusting God every step of the way and loving and encouraging the others we meet along the course.

This All-Saints' Day reminds us that there are billions in the stadium above cheering us along every step of the way. We all need the cheering of saints past and present because following Jesus is really hard and because rewards are sometimes slow in coming.

As Abraham struggled to trust in and receive his reward, he asked for a sign. God had him sacrifice animals and place them around him. Then Abraham went into a deep dark sleep. In the dream, God told him about the future sufferings of his people in Egypt but that they would one day return to and inherit this land. Then a smoking firepot from heaven walked through this bloody and scary dark landscape.

This is our sign from heaven. The Messiah of that long-suffering people himself walked through the valley of sacrifice and darkness and rose up into the light of eternal life. Jesus reveals that God's promises are sure. So race after the assurance and encouragement of Jesus through studying, praying and fellowship in His body. This is how we rise up out of barrenness into the hope, the reality and the service of the Kingdom of Heaven. To the God of all grace who calls us to eternal reunion with Christ Jesus be all the power and the glory now and forevermore. And God's people say...