Dear Reader,

I am new to producing reading sermons. So, if you have any suggestions as to how I might improve my format or what I include – please email me at cdanielwilson@gmail.com. **I will warn you, that I do not use short sentences**. I will endeavor to work on this over time, but I don’t naturally write that way. However, you can easily break most of my longer sentences into 2 or 3 smaller ones where I have “…” or “–“ or commas. If you do the work on making it into smaller sentences – feel free to email it to me, and I am happy to share your work with others. I do have some of these available which people have sent me. I will eventually make them available as part of the normal manuscripts.

I have left my sermon manuscript formatted the way I normally write and read my sermons. They are colourful and written in conversational English. If you are a grammar nazi – then you will be frustrated with my punctuation and phrasing. However, once you read it out loud, you will normally be able to tell what I meant to say. SERIOUSLY, READ IT OUTLOUD. You will also see that I use a good bit of bold, italics, underlining and different colours to signal what are the most important things to say, and also to make it easier for my eye to pick up my place in the middle of paragraphs. I would recommend that you keep as many of those things as possible to help you keep your place. However, you will probably want to increase the spacing between lines. I highly encourage you to commit as much of the introduction or children’s illustrations to memory as you can, so that these can be delivered to the congregation with maximum eye contact.

**Where possible, I highly recommend that you listen to the sermon as I preached it at either the Nelson website or the website of North Shore.** I recommend that because that will also help hear the places where I added or skipped over material in the manuscript, and the places where I clarified my meaning. I have edited bits and pieces which I thought most important, but I have not sought to include all the additional material that comes to me while in the pulpit. I would practically have to use a transcription service for that. However, I hope and pray that this sermon will be a blessing to you and to your congregation. To God be the Glory!

Blessings in our Lord, Pastor Daniel Wilson

**My Suggestions for the Order of Service**

Song before the Service:**Psalm #1**

*We are here to worship God, because:* ***OUR Help is in the name of the Lord, the maker of the Heavens & the Earth.*** *God greets you with His grace:* ***May Grace & Peace be yours thru the knowledge of the Triune God, x3.* Amen**

*Let us now Worship our God as we sing a* **Song of Praise** **111 “O Give the Lord, Whole hearted Praise” vs.1-3 & 5-6**

**Call to Confession of Faith:** – Apostles Creed

Read Lords’s Day 25

Congregational Prayer

22B Covenant

Hebrews 11:8-16

Tithes Offerings

INTRODUCE ***#105B***

Scripture Reading/Text: Genesis 17:1-14 **Sermon Title: “Covenant Refresher Course”**

**\* Song of Response: #462 “How Firm a Foundation”** *Which celebrates God’s covenant promises in His Word!*

***May God the Father*** *bless you & keep you,* ***May God the Son*** *turn His face toward you & be gracious to you,* ***May the Holy Spirit*** *lift up his countenance upon you & give you peace!* ***Amen***

***Doxology*: #531**

# Evening Sermon: “Covenant Refresher Course” Heidelberg #27 / Sacraments #1

Text: Genesis 17:1-14 Reading: Hebrews 11:8-16

*As many of you who have been here a while know – there is a surprisingly wide variety of backgrounds represented in this congregation. We have people from Reformed and Covenantal homes, others from Baptist, Anglican, Presbyterian, or charismatic churches, and non-Christians from a variety of different religions! And when you add that from each of those categories we have some Korean, Chinese, South African, Dutch, Kiwi, Maori, English/American and so on… you begin to realize our diversity! Now, in this local congregation, in Christ, that diversity can be forged into a unity which is HIS body, and His Bride – His Church. And as God draws us closer in love and Biblical understanding we will be stronger in our individual faiths and stronger as a congregation.*

*However, for now, there are still number of differences of opinion and doctrine from member to member. And one of the most striking areas of difference is represented in our view of the sacraments. I originally intended to simply preach through the 5 or so Lord’s Days which deal with the sacraments, but the more I thought about it, the more I realized that I would do you a great disservice in doing so – for I would of necessity have to neglect one aspect or another of each section. So, instead of taking 6 weeks to work through this material, I will be covering LD25-31 over the next couple of months… ….*

***So this evening, as we begin this series I have decided to start with the OT sacraments first. So please turn in your Bibles to Genesis 17*** *(intro explain original covenant in 15)*

**INTRODUCTION:** This evening I want to begin by explaining the idea of the covenant to the children. Children, you have heard me say the word covenant many times, but tonight I want to explain it to you. The children’s catechism explains a covenant as *An agreement between two or more persons.* And that is the basic meaning of the word covenant. Your Mom and Dad made a covenant/an agreement to love one another when they got married. They decided as two equal people to make that agreement, and you children are just some of the results of that agreement!

Tonight, we are talking about the covenant/agreement that God made with Abraham. **You have heard about Abraham before, haven’t you?** ... But God’s covenant/agreement with Abraham and his family was a different type of covenant. It was not an agreement between two friends (like your mom and dad), RATHER, this was an agreement between a higher person and a lower person… Like an agreement between A King and a poor person in their kingdom.

***Another example of this type of agreement is one between your parents and you. Most of you know that God has placed your parents in charge of you. You MUST obey your parents in the Lord, for that is Right!***

 Now, God has commanded that your parents feed you and take care of you, and He has also commanded that they teach you and discipline you. But, did you know that God has never commanded your parents to do fun things with you?! God never gave a command for your moms and Dads to take you on holiday, or go to the beach or to take you to the park! When your parents do nice things like that for you, they are doing something they don’t have to do!

**Let’s say that your parents made an agreement with you** – If you obey them by cleaning up your room and by keeping it clean for a long time (a month or more)… then they would take you on holiday to Australia. That would be a neat agreement right? IT is really neat, because God already has said that you MUST obey your parents! *And He hasn’t told your parents to reward you with trips and treats*. So, your parents are agreeing to give you something extra that they don’t have to give you (a trip to Australia) and all you have to do is something you were already supposed to do (obey by cleaning up your room). It is a really wonderful deal – do what you are supposed to and you get something extra.

**That is the same type of agreement that God made with Abraham** – God said, walk before me and be perfect (obey) and I will confirm my covenant/agreement with you and you WILL GREATLY INCREASE – in other words, you will have a BIG family. Abraham was already supposed to obey God ***because*** *God made him and is ruler over all things*. So God told Abraham if you do what you are already supposed to do - obey me; then I will give you something extra that you don’t deserve! Instead of a trip to Australia, God promised Abraham a big family and a big inheritance: *the land of Canaan in this life***, but even more,** God promised Him salvation and heaven after he died! **What a fantastic bargain!**

God’s covenant was an amazing gracious gift from the very beginning… It was never a burden, or extra rules – it was always God saying do what you are supposed to do, and I will give you something you don’t deserve!

WHAT IS EVEN better, is that we are told in the New Testament that Jesus Himself obeyed the rules/commands of God for all of us who love and trust Him. **We are told in Genesis 15, that Abraham believed God.** And so by faith, Jesus kept Abraham’s side of the Covenant! It would be like your dad making that agreement with you children about taking you to Australia if you keep your room clean, **and then** your dad coming and cleaning your room for you! God the Son, Jesus Christ, obeyed in our place, because we couldn’t do it, & we STILL get the benefits! ***We get the trip to Heaven! …***

**Now that is a quick, crash course in the Covenant, but it is foundational for all that follows:**

**I want us to continue this evening, by simply walking through the text in a very conversational way and I want to draw some things to your attention. (*warn:*** *belabor points, keep Bibles open* ***focus*)**

**The First thing I want you to note** is EXACTLY WHAT I just explained to the children. NAMELY: that this covenant God made with Abraham was a unilateral gracious covenant; calling Abraham to do something he was already required to do, and in return: promising Abraham something he didn’t deserve and couldn’t earn. As we are told in Genesis 15:6 and in the end of John 8, God accepted Abraham as righteous (not because He kept Covenant) **but because he believed in Jesus – the coming Messiah.**

**The next thing I want you to note** is that this covenant was a FAMILY COVENANT. God hints at it in verses 2 & 4, but in verse 7 God clearly states that this covenant was not just for Abraham – it was for his whole family, for many generations. The neat thing that we miss in the English translation is the strong emphasis God used here. He literally says, “I will establish my covenant between me and between you, and between your descendants after you– throughout their generations AS AN Everlasting Covenant – to be your God and the God of your descendants after you!” AMAZING Emphasis on the family and the descendants of Abraham – ***NASB is remarkably accurate here…***

**We also see** that this is an EVERLASTING COVENANT – it lasts forever! You can read about this aspect of the covenant in Romans 4 & James 2 – there God reveals that Abraham is the father of believers because He was saved by faith. So we are today, a continuation of these generations of descendants included in THIS Abrahamic covenant!

**In verse 8, we come across the land promise that was connected with this covenant.** But as we read in Hebrews 11, Abraham was not looking for merely a physical land or physical city. He was only a pilgrim/sojourner on earth, and was waiting for and looking forward to Heaven! The writer to the Hebrews makes it clear that the **ultimate fulfillment** of this land promise is in fact: Heaven – the Heavenly Jerusalem. The city whose architect and builder is God Himself. **So you don’t need to** get too caught up by all the *land promise stuff* you hear from other churches – you do not need to go buy land in Israel for any reason other than the purpose of moving there – there is no longer any spiritual significance to that land!

**In verse 9, God continues speaking saying to Abraham, “READ 9-10” In verse 10, we see that Circumcision was mandatory for every male “among you.”** This concept is explained further in verses 12-13, but whether a person was slave or free, purchased or born in Abraham’s house – they were all to be circumcised. Abraham’s males from his entire household were to receive circumcision. From 8 days old to 99+ - all newcomers into the Covenant Home were to be circumcised (young and old). To refuse circumcision meant that that male had to be cut off from the rest of God’s people – God explains that in verse 14: **READ**

***Now, going back to verses 10-11****, we see Why God would treat this sign so seriously… because circumcision was the sign of His covenant.* **READ Verse 11 (flesh of foreskin) privates**

 **I want you to notice two things out of this verse:** First) this circumcision was the sign of the covenant. It was the sign, the badge, the visible indication that a particular male (and his family) were members of God’s covenant people. BUT Also, **SECONDLY:** IT IS CRUCIAL to note that this was a private sign between GOD and MAN… (he says between me and you). It was not a readily visible mark… Other nations couldn’t look at a Jew walking down the street and say – Hey that guy is circumcised (it was NOT a physically obvious sign like a tattoo on your forehead!). **It was a private sign primarily for God and His covenant people.** When God saw the sign of the covenant – He said, this man (and his family) belongs to me, when the man saw the scar of the circumcision, he said, I belong to God! I worship Him alone! *There was an element of setting apart for ownership by God involved in circumcision.*

**It is also very uncomfortable, but necessary to note that this was a bloody sign.** *In every circumcision, blood is shed and flesh is cut off a sensitive, private part of the man’s body.* And as we read in Colossians 2 and 3, the Apostle Paul refers to circumcision as the cutting off of the body of flesh – it was symbolic of shedding blood to get rid of the old man, the sinful flesh – So it very much pointed to Jesus shedding His blood for the remission of sins. **In Fact:** All the OT rituals were bloody to point to the one time sacrifice of Jesus Christ. *After Christ*, no more blood needed to be shed, which is why circumcision is no longer required – indeed, this connection to Christ is why Paul argues so powerfully AGAINST continuing the sign of circumcision in the book of Galatians!

**The final and most important point for us to note from this text is the extent of circumcision.** We already noted the command to circumcise every male in the house young and old **– but there is an even greater, more formative concept revealed here…**And that lesson is revealed in verses 15 and following

 **Vs. 15-16:** God says that Sarah will be the one to bear Abraham’s promised son.

 **Vs. 17-18:** Abraham didn’t believe God – laughed to Himself and said… ***THERE* is unbelief**… So, FLOWING from that unbelief, Abraham offers God a way out, saying: “***If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!***” He is thinking, no 100 year old man and 90 year old woman will have a child together – So God, Why not let Ishmael be the child of the promise – don’t worry about this hard thing… ***Please Note how logical and considerate we are in our unbelief! But it is still unbelief!***

 **Vs.19-22:** God responds/speaks to Abraham saying, No, But Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. ***THIS IS IMPORTANT:*** *and* *I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him…. And as for Ishmael…* ***and then God******explains will still be a great nation etc, but no covenant… jump to verse 21****:* BUT MY COVENANT I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year!

 **Do you see the power in the comparison?** God would certainly bless Ishmael physically with descendants and family etc, **but God refuses to establish His covenant in particular with Him.** In other words, while Ishmael was in Abraham’s house and was his son – God specifically reveals to Abraham that Ishmael would NOT be saved! **The Apostle Paul explains this in Romans 9:6-9  *like this*:**

Paul is explaining that not all Jews were saved – and He uses Ishmael and Isaac as the first example – namely that while they were both descendants of Abraham, ***Isaac was the only child of promise who was saved!*** And God declared that to ABRAHAM saying, **but I will establish my covenant with Isaac**!

And yet, with this divine revelation to Abraham that his son Ishmael was **NOT** going to be saved by God, what did he do? **VERSE 23ff:** *Abraham gave the sign of the covenant to a 13 year old boy whom God had authoritatively declared would NOT be saved!*

***WOW!*** *The OT sign of the covenant was required even in the absence of faith!* ***NO, more than that…*** *The Sign of circumcision was rightly given to a son who was actually a known reprobate – one whom God had declared as rejected from His covenant of salvation!*

And yet, we know from **Deuteronomy chapters** **10**:16 **and** **30**:6, **that the HEART was still the most important part of circumcision.** For every recipient of the physical sign of circumcision was called to also circumcise the foreskin of their hearts! ***(to put off the old man, the flesh of sin)***

**So what are we to learn from this…** Many of our Baptistic brothers of course reject any connection between circumcision and baptism… ***And for tonight, let’s assume they are correct.*** One of the arguments against the Baptism of covenant children is that it seems strange to apply a symbol of salvation to those who are not yet saved. **In fact, the argument is often developed**, “How dare you apply water baptism to an infant who may turn out to be a reprobate” … It is thought, that by baptizing them you are EITHER assuming that they will become a Christian, or Worse, you are Roman Catholic in thinking that Baptism will save them… Our Brothers are essentially arguing that our baptism is either an abomination to God (giving God’s sign to the potentially unsaved) or it is presumption (assuming that baptism saves).

HOWEVER, the OT sign of salvation was given to a 13 year old boy who had rejected God, and whom God had openly rejected. **AND there was no offense to God** **in giving him that sign –** in fact, God would have been angry had Abraham disobeyed! And secondly, there was no presumption on Abraham’s part, He didn’t assume that the sign of the covenant would save Ishmael – He only obeyed what God had commanded!

 You see… God doesn’t think like you and me – if anything, we reflect the tiniest copy of HIS wisdom and knowledge! And What He does is beyond our understanding! **What a glorious God we serve!** His thoughts are infinitely higher than our thoughts – for He made a covenant with Abraham which has lasted over 4 thousand years!! And God still continues to bless Abraham’s covenant children even now… Except now, He is choosing them from every nation under heaven… ***saving us by giving us faith in Christ*!**

These things which we have studied tonight, may be hard for you to understand – But you need to remember that we will be coming back to these ideas in the coming weeks!

So, How do you apply this? If nothing else, You have to sit back and say, “God your ways are higher than mine. ***Give me understanding by your Holy Spirit…”*** A Humble Awe is an appropriate application!

***BEGIN To understand that God is bigger/grander and more wise than what you think is logical… AND THAT will set you on the right path to search the Word for yourself!***

***God promises that as you search the Word by faith, He will give you wisdom!***

***BUT Secondly, REMEMBER the Awesome Grace of God’s Covenant!*** *He promises you what you do not deserve, in exchange for what you already owe Him… and then He provided a way for your end of the bargain to be kept FOR YOU!* ***That is certainly an idea worth remembering!***

 AMEN!