

Scripture Reading:

Acts 2:29 "Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30 Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, 31 he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. 32 This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. 33 Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. 34 For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, 35 Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'" 36 "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." 37 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" 38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

'The Promise if Fulfilled'

We have been studying the first great sermon in the Book of Acts, given by Peter to those Jews who have gathered at Jerusalem for the celebration of Pentecost. We see this morning those who have been listening are 'cut to the heart.' The dead bones have come back to life and the Breath, the Holy Spirit has given them life which we first see evidenced as a real conviction of sin. Unlike Cain, or Pharaoh, or Judas or even the religious leaders we will see confronting the Apostles in the coming chapters, all of whom hardened their hearts...

- These men cry out 'what shall we do?'
- Peter declares to them, 'repent and be baptized' because the promise is to you and to your children, and to all those who are afar off.

My plan is to spend two weeks considering this conclusion of Peter's sermon, looking next week at the reach of the covenant. This week, my sermon title is simply the promise of the covenant, which in strictly Biblical terms is a bit of a redundancy:

- A covenant is a promise and when Peter says 'the promise is to you' he is referring to the covenant of salvation

There have been no major fights in the Church over which of these words to use...

- But when Peter says the promise is to you & your children, then we have the 800 pound gorilla entering in the room...

Covenant or infant baptism v. believer's baptism has been a major debate in the American Church since the founding of our nation-- AND BOTH claim Peter!

Here at Church of the King we believe that the children of the covenant are to be given the sign of the covenant, so I want to take a little time to consider this question...

Our goal is not to put 'those other folks' in their place, but to make sure that we understand what we believe, that our children understand why they were baptized and so we are ready to give an answer for why we hold to this position

- **When considering whether the children of believers should be baptized it is appropriate and important to ask what happened after Peter's sermon?**

I believe this is a critical question, because the text before us is actually used by both sides of the baptism debate as the major reason they believe what they believe.

- **Those who hold to believer's baptism argue that Peter's command for those convicted of sin to repent and be baptized proves that only those who can repent & make a credible confession of their faith are to be baptized.**
- **Infants and young children cannot do so, and thus should not be baptized until they are converted**

Peter goes on to say that the promise is 'unto you and to your children' which throughout Church history, has been given as the reason to administer the sacrament of baptism to believers & their covenant children.

IF we limit the discussion to only the New Testament, both sides end up arguing from silence:

- **Those who hold to believer's baptism will tell us you can search from Acts to Revelation and you will NOT find one example of an infant being baptized.**
- **Those who hold to covenantal baptism say you can search from Acts to Revelation & you will NOT find one example of a covenant child making a profession of faith and being baptized.**

BOTH are right as far as these statements go!

- **Why was God not more specific, so we could have avoided all this debate??**

We do believe the answer is found in the Bible... In the Old Testament!

- **BOTH sides agree that Peter's promise applies to the adults who were present and repenting:**
- **The debate is over HOW this promise applies to their children, since Peter says that it does.**
- **Here the lessons we are learning from Luke's Gospel and Acts about the importance of the Old Testament come to our aid**
- **As a Bible-believing Church, we must believe ALL of the Bible!**

I have often pointed out how it is somewhat ironic that while the 20th Century can be seen as the time where the battle for the Bible was won...

- **It is also a time where we lost, for all practical purposes much of the Bible in many of our churches!**

Fundamentalists and evangelicals rightly fought so-called "higher critics" & outright skeptics who cast doubt on the authority of God's Word:

- **The 1968 Chicago Congress on the Inerrancy of the Bible was a major turning point and a great victory for God's Church.**

However, while slaying that dragon, the Church was over taken by twin errors which resulted in the practical loss of much of the same Bible they had so rightly fought for!

For eighteen centuries, the Church believed what I have been presenting as Luke's orderly account:

- That the Jesus came to forgive the sins of His people**
- That Jesus established His Church, which He commissioned to disciple the nations:**
- That through the Church, the New Jerusalem, Jesus had ushered in the new heavens and the new earth as promised in the Book of Revelation:**
 - **The believing Church saw all of this as a fulfillment of God's Covenant promises!**
 - **They had robustly what we would call today a world & life view of the Gospel!**

Over the past two hundred years, many have shifted almost all of the Book of Revelation into the future and "spiritualized" our salvation with a very unhealthy pietism where spiritual things are up there and worldly things are down here!

- **This had a profound impact on how the Church viewed the Bible!**
- **The liberals wanted to throw out the whole Book and we rightly said NO**
- **However, as the Church shifted its view of God's covenant of salvation, much of the Bible was given up voluntarily:**

Let me explain: The historic church and our great reformation creeds knew nothing of the modern teachings about God having a plan "A" for Israel and a plan "B" for salvation in the church age. An Old Testament plan "A" of salvation by works given by Moses which largely failed & then plan "B" with the church age & salvation by grace.

They also resisted the temptation to see the body as 'bad' and the spirit as 'good' like the Greek philosophers and early Gnostic heretics did.

- **The American Church has largely accepted both errors & this shift greatly impacted which parts of the Bible are now relevant to believers in the "Church Age."**

Most of the Old Testament is GONE... different plan of salvation for a different people. We still might use some bits of wisdom in Psalms and Proverbs and maybe there are some good moral lessons for Sunday School... But that is about it.

Even when we move into the New Testament things changed: Most of the Gospels involve Jesus debating with the Jews about Old Testament stuff, which does not affect us.

We have been taught that the "Church Age" began at Pentecost after Jesus has been rejected by His Old Testament people...

- **Paul provides teaching for the Church in His Epistles, but even much of what he has to say is left behind when he gets too practical instead of being spiritual!**

We don't know quite what to do with James and Hebrews... And of course, Revelation is only talking about future stuff that takes place AFTER the church is raptured, so NO application there either: Just great material for best-selling fiction novels.

So our 'end-times' madness and Gnostic pietism have indirectly accomplished most of what the seminary liberals were unable to accomplish with a direct attack:

- **Most of the Bible is gone for practical purposes!**

We have gone along with this even though the Apostle Paul clearly instructs young Timothy that, “16 ALL Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work!”

Whether we believe that ALL of Scripture gives us instruction in righteousness will definitely impact how we answer the question of whether to baptize our children!

- We must learn to see that when Peter tells these gathered Jews that the promise is unto you and your children, they did not wonder what He meant
- First & foremost, they knew what the promise was...

In Genesis 3:15, God gave His promise to Adam, that the seed of the woman, Jesus Christ, would crush the seed of the serpent: Satan. Later in Genesis, we have the flood & God making promises to Noah.

- We learn here that God gives signs, like the rainbow, to remind HIM of HIS promises!

In Genesis 15, we come to one of the most beautiful and the most instructive chapters in the Bible!

- Here we see the faithfulness of our covenant God and some basic instructions about covenants.

God comes and says, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.”

In verse 5 we read this: “5 Then He brought [Abraham] outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." 6 And he believed Jehovah, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.”

Two important things here:

- First the wonder of the promise: A childless old man looking up at billions of stars on a clear night as God promises “So shall your descendants be”
- Next we see the power of God’s gift of faith: That’s right, we are being instructed here in Genesis about salvation by faith!

You see, the Apostle Paul had no problem seeing ALL of the Bible as God’s Word and he uses this account in Romans chapter four to make his case for salvation by grace!

We know from Ephesians that God’s gracious Covenant of Salvation was made before the foundation of the worlds among only the persons of the Trinity: *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*.

Paul begins his Epistle with this glorious declaration: Ephesians 1:3

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved.”

We are not given a blow-by-blow account of how this covenant between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit was made & as mere creatures most of it would be beyond our comprehension anyway.

- What we can and DO know about that Covenant is given to us as God reveals various aspects of it in the Bible: Like Genesis 15!
- At the end of this chapter, God demonstrates the security Abram has in trusting God’s promise:

God tells Abram to bring animals as people in those times might have done when making a contract or a covenant: *[explain the covenant ritual]*

- So traditionally, if God and Abram are making a covenant they would walk together between the animals saying let this happen to me if I break this covenant.

That is not what happens here and this should be of GREAT comfort to us as God's children, the heirs of Abraham.

- When evening comes, Abram sees God and God alone walk between the pieces!
- A beautiful, moving, & practical example of how our salvation is ALL of grace
- Abram did not have to promise to be good
- He did not have to pass through the pieces as a 'partner' with God in His salvation
- Abram had to do nothing to earn his salvation!

Abram simply had to believe, in faith: A faith that was itself a gift from His loving Father: Here we clearly see the Gospel: salvation by grace in the Old Testament.

- So, we must be a people of the Word... ALL of God's Word!
- The gracious covenant which the Father, Son and Holy Spirit made before the foundation of the world is revealed from Genesis to Revelation!
- It is THE promise, the covenant of salvation that we claim for us and our children here at Church of the King!
- We must see that it is God's great covenant faithfulness that is being testified too in Baptism!
- We are to baptize our children because we believe His promise!
- Baptism is a sign which God sees and remembers His promise!

This had certainly been the pattern in the Old Testament with circumcision and it would be strange for Peter to make this promise and then have the children excluded without any explanation.

Having women baptized would have seemed strange as well

- This is why I believe we are given clear examples of women being baptized, like Lydia AND why Paul stresses that under the Gospel there is neither male nor female so there is no doubt

Here at Church of the King we believe that as officers in Christ's Church we are commanded to baptize those who make a profession of faith AND their children... BOTH based on God's promise!

Just as Abraham was commanded to circumcise those in his household.

- Does this mean that everyone who repents, makes a profession of faith and is baptized is saved for all eternity? No.

As we clearly see with cases later in Acts and our churches today, there are some who are not sincere, but we cannot know the heart and must accept their testimony and trust God's promise.

- However, this is the major objection raised to baptizing our covenant children:
- We cannot "know" they are saved for all eternity as members of God's elect.

We don't, just as with adults, but God's promise applies to them, just as it does for any adult who repents.

- Based on God’s promise confessing adults and covenant children should be baptized and treated as members of the Church unless and until they prove to be covenant breakers.

Think about it this way: Which is the greater “testimony?”

First we hear a stunning conversion story of a drug-addicted atheist college professor. He knows the time and date that he was convicted of his sin, gave his life to Jesus, giving up his drugs and can show how he now debates his former colleagues.

Then we hear from a faithful member of a local church who recently married in the faith. He attends church every Sunday, faithfully worshiping God each week as he confesses his sins and hears God’s forgiveness. He has no conversion ‘experience’ but has trusted Christ as his Savior for as long as he can remember!”

Sadly, in many American churches today, they would put the first front and center at the baptismal pool BUT they would wonder about the second person, ‘is REALLY saved?’

- BOTH of these testimonies are the result of God’s eternal decree of salvation: Their names written in the Lamb’s Book of Life: Saved by God’s gracious love!
- Both are covered under Peter’s promise and their salvation in both cases is the result of them receiving the gift of faith.
- You see, in BOTH cases the focus should NOT be on their faithfulness, but rather the faithfulness of God...

To help us understand this, let me close by taking us back to the account in Luke’s Gospel of the centurion’s great faith: *[Luke 7:1-10]* Jesus marveled at this man’s faith and it is one of only two places where Jesus, as the Son of Man, marveled at during His earthly ministry:

- He marveled at this man’s faith near the city of Capernaum
- And other was in His own home town where Mark tells us: “5 He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. 6 And He marveled because of their unbelief.”

IF we would rather have Jesus marvel at our faith rather than our unbelief, this soldier is our example.

- First, the Centurion approaches Jesus with a humble and contrite heart: Fearing God!

““Lord, do not trouble Yourself, for I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof. 7 Therefore I did not even think myself worthy to come to You.”

- The centurion believes that Jesus is the Lord who can speak and heal this servant!

“But say the word, and my servant will be healed.”

- This Centurion believed that Jesus was the one with ultimate authority.
- Just as the Centurion would obey an order from his general, or just as he could command a soldier to act and he would obey.
- So he believes that if Jesus says the word that his servant would be healed, that the very demons of hell would have to obey.

There is no begging, no emotions, no excuses or rationalizing and certainly NO proud appeals for something that this Centurion deserved:

- Just an appeal for Jesus to do what Jesus had the power to do!

Now let us note the reaction of Jesus:

“9 When Jesus heard these things, He marveled at him, and turned around and said to the crowd that followed Him, "I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!"

Jesus says we have seen great faith: Do you want to have great faith?

- **We must believe that God is the Creator & we are mere creatures!**
- **To have such great faith is to “believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”**
- **To have this great faith we must believe that "All authority has been given to [Jesus] in heaven & on earth.”**

This is what we see here in Luke’s account:

A God-fearing Centurion who simply believed that Jesus was who He claimed to be!

- **He seeks Him bringing a simple request for the servant he loves and his request is granted.**
- **This is the great faith that should apprehend the promise Peter offers in his sermon!**

It is such great faith that is demonstrated when we bring one of our covenant children to be baptized into the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

- **Great faith is what causes the parents to bring their little children to the feet of Jesus to have them baptized.**
- **The father and mother do not believe they are worthy to parent such great gifts, just as the centurion thought himself unworthy of having Jesus in his home!**
- **The parents demonstrate that they believe that their little precious child was born dead in trespasses and sin – Just as the centurion’s servant was “sick and ready to die!”**
- **The parents demonstrate that they believe their covenant children will ONLY be saved through the same gracious gift of faith that has saved them!
- Jesus must say the word!**
- **Faithful parents come claiming the promise of Jesus that salvation is unto them and their children, asking Jesus to say the word, believing that their children will be healed, made whole and righteous through the blood of their Savior Jesus.**
- **And Lord-willing the parents who have presented their children for baptism, and the rest of us as their helpers, will continue to demonstrate this great faith as our covenant children grow into a strong disciples of Jesus; calling them continuously back to the day of their Baptism & challenging them to live as who they are in Christ!**

Some will certainly charge that we are teaching or at least headed down the road toward presumptive regeneration:

- **We are being no more presumptuous than this Centurion who had great faith.**
- **This Centurion believed in the real Jesus and requested that He do what was in His power to do.**
- **This is what Jesus called “great faith!”**

He did not presume that Jesus would heal his servant, but asked Him to show compassion just as we ask for each of our covenant children

We are coming to the Jesus who has the power to save and claiming the promise pronounced in Peter's 2nd Epistle: "9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."

When we show such great faith, we join with Joshua in saying, "as for my house, we will serve the Lord!"

- We stand here today believing the words of Jesus just like that faithful Centurion: The one to whom Jesus said "Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you!"

Luke tells us that "his servant was healed that same hour."

- The Angel Gabriel proclaimed to Joseph that Jesus would save His people from their sins!
- Jesus has commanded us to disciple the nations baptizing them and teaching them to observe all things that Jesus has commanded.

Today, WE are called & commanded to have the same great faith we have seen in this faithful Centurion:

- We do so by believing all of God's promises & acting upon them!

Communion Meditation: Matthew 18:1-6

"1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" 2 Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, 3 and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me. "