



THE SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

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February 28, 2021
Anglican Parish of Raymond Terrace
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Pray:

May I speak to you in the name of GOD – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen



Our aim today is to see how GOD made and kept His promise to Abraham.

This is the point at which GOD confirmed His repeated promise to Abraham with the sign of circumcision. The relationship between GOD and Abraham develops over chapters 12-24 of Genesis. In chapter 12 GOD calls Abraham to leave Ur and makes general promises to him; in chapter 15 GOD develops His promises with reference to the son who will be born to his wife Sarai. In chapter 17 GOD confirms those promises again and expands them. This is the relationship based upon promise – not what Abraham can do for GOD but what GOD will do for Abraham. Abraham simply had to believe. ^In Genesis 15:6 it says: ⁶And he (Abraham) believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as

righteousness.” In his letter to the Romans Paul tells us:

³For what does the scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.’

²²Therefore his faith ‘was reckoned to him as righteousness.’

Genesis 15: 6 is crucial to Paul’s argument in Romans 4. In the previous 3 chapters Paul has demonstrated that GOD has no favourites – neither Jew nor Gentile can consider themselves righteous before GOD. Paul then settles down to show that this has always been the case. Some Jews seemed to think that they were considered to be righteous before GOD on the basis of obeying the Law of Moses. We cannot be sure that they all thought this – but some certainly did. This is likely since human beings tend to seek to justify themselves. For Paul, Abraham was a crucial example. He preceded the giving of the Law to Moses by hundreds of years and it was clearly his faith that pleased GOD – not what he did as such. GOD’s promise was simply based on Abraham’s faith. GOD’s promise, based on His grace, operates by

means of human faith. So, Abraham's descendants cannot only be those who possess the Law (the Jews) but everyone who is able to exercise faith – many nations – huge numbers of descendants. GOD's promise includes all today who exercise faith in that way.



Up to the beginning of our Gospel passage for today, JESUS' words and deeds have been characterised by astonishing authority and power. This first declaration of His imminent suffering and death stands in blunt contrast to, and completely undercuts, the Messianic expectations of Peter and his fellow disciples.

When JESUS describes Himself as "Son of Man", it implicitly connects His suffering with His divine identity. It reveals not just the nature of His Messiahship but more importantly, the very character of GOD. It stresses JESUS' conformity to GOD's will and character as expressed in the Scriptures. In saying that He will suffer many things, He identifies with Isaiah's suffering servant – who, in bearing Israel's covenant curse, would redeem

the nation from bondage, and restore them to GOD. By speaking plainly, JESUS underlined the centrality of the cross for Him and His mission. Whatever Peter might have understood about JESUS' previous statements when he described Himself as the Son of Man, Peter had no room in his thinking for any notion of GOD's glorious Messiah being rejected and executed.

Peter is not alone and JESUS' rebuke is directed not at he and the disciples personally, but at their view of things. God now reveals his attitude in JESUS' totally unexpected "suffering servant" approach and embrace of the cross. Through the gospels, JESUS says that everything will make more sense after He has risen from the dead. ^The human concerns JESUS talks about when he rebukes Peter in verse 33 are things like a love of power and status, the yeast of Herod and the Pharisees, and later, the disciples jockeying for greatness and their elitist exclusion of others – all concerns that occupy satan.

JESUS then goes on to state the cost of being His disciple in [^]verse 34 – to follow Him means that one must die to one's own agenda – whether social, political or spiritual.

JESUS re-defined the church's teaching on purity. Here, He says that our lives must be characterised by cross-bearing – so that we can stand out from the crowd. Discipleship has now taken a radical turn. To be a disciple, we must decide to follow JESUS anew by denying ourselves and taking up our cross.

[^]Verse 36 tells us that possessing the whole world means nothing if we don't have eternal life.

Finally, verse 38 talks of the world's attitude towards crucifixion. Crucifixion was an unspeakably weak and shameful death in the eyes of a world fixated on status and power. But the world's standards have no place in GOD's kingdom and JESUS will reject those who hold them. To unfaithful is to be adulterous – and is a common scriptural metaphor for idolatry – and is used in the Bible to mean that someone is unfaithful to GOD.

The final part of the final verse of our gospel today refers to JESUS telling us more of what his title “Son of Man” means. It points to His righteousness being confirmed – if ever there was any doubt – through His resurrection on Easter Day. JESUS is the authoritative and glorious figure to whom GOD will give everlasting dominion over all nations.



May we pray:

Help us gracious LORD to live our lives trusting in You – never being ashamed to call ourselves followers of JESUS. Transform us into the people you would have us become – so that we might deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow you. This we pray through JESUS CHRIST our LORD. Amen.

All-Age Lectionary Services – Scripture Union – 2011 – Milton Keynes, England

NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible – D.A. Carson General Editor – Zondervan 2018