

(aka God): Eternal God

Reconnect – May 22, 2011

(aka God)

How what He's been called shows who He continues to be

El-Olam:

(Eternal God)

May 22, 2011

re:connect
Beersheva Community Church

Text: Genesis 21:22-34; I Thessalonians 5:1-11

Key Thought: The eternal God of Abraham still controls history and can be trusted with our futures, too.

After making their covenant at Beersheba, Abimelech left with Phicol, the commander of his army, and they returned home to the land of the Philistines. Then Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba, and there he worshiped the Lord, the Eternal God. And Abraham lived as a foreigner in Philistine country for a long time. (Genesis 21:32-34, NLT)

Pre-Intro: CNN reports on the end of the world as May 21, 2011 [video]

Intro: The end of the world as we know it?



Q: Talk to me about what's been happening with the predictions around yesterday. What are your thoughts? Any questions about it all? Had any conversations about it with other people?

- Latest in a long line of those trying to predict the end of the world, and failing
- But there will be some kind of "save" – a recalculation, or an "out"
- Jesus said that even HE didn't know the day or the hour... but people are still trying to one-up Him, all these centuries later
- Sad, because like anything, the mistake, the error, tends to define something that might actually be important...

“Beam us up, Scotty... there’s no intelligent life down here”



- I was reading an article in the National Post this week, and it talked about the types of people that messages like this really connect with – those who don’t have deep roots into their lives, who have had some failures, who are at crossroads, who are adrift and looking for something to hold on to – and this is what they find and embrace and go forward with
- Now let’s be honest – we’ve ALL had days where we wished that everything could just be over with, right? That if there was a “reset” button that someone could reach, we wished they would do it? That if God was going to blow everything up, that right then would be a great time?
- But then we get a good night’s sleep, or an encouraging email, or we have something to eat, and we put our apocalyptic desires on hold
- Or we get so grieved with the state of our world – we read that news story of some atrocity, or some horrible event, or something that we wouldn’t have thought people evil enough to devise – and we wish that God would just finally make everything right and shut the rest of it down, so that we could be free from evil and pain and sorrow
- But then we see something good – or we see human kindness in action – and again, we put our apocalyptic desires on hold and carry on, trying to make a difference
- Others of us go through difficult times long-term in our lives, and the desire to be free of them is something that becomes a constant companion, sometimes in the background, sometimes front and centre
- And as we walk difficult roads, we ask ourselves, “Where is God?” – why isn’t He interested, why doesn’t He care, why isn’t He DOING something?
- These are questions people of faith have been asking for thousands of years – they’re good questions – and the section of Abraham’s life that we’re going to look at more closely this morning speaks to it

Read/Explain Text: Genesis 21:22-34, NLT

About this time, Abimelech came with Phicol, his army commander, to visit Abraham. “God is obviously with you, helping you in everything you do,” Abimelech said. “Swear to me in God’s name that you will never deceive me, my children, or any of my descendants. I have been loyal to you, so now swear that you will be loyal to me and to this country where you are living as a foreigner.” Abraham replied, “Yes, I swear to it!”

- Abraham already has history with Abimelech, the ruler of the Philistines – he was one of the powerful men who had tried to take Sarah for his own
- (Some things never change – DSK, Arnold Schwarzenegger, etc.)
- Since that time, Abraham has just gotten bigger – and he’s floating on the edge of Philistine territory, and they’re worried, given their history, about his intentions
- Abimelech has already come face to face with Abraham’s God – and now he wants to make sure that he will always be on Abraham’s good side
- But instead of a Hallmark moment, they are actually entering into a complicated bargaining session – haggling with each other in the politest way possible of the times, but haggling all the same

Then Abraham complained to Abimelech about a well that Abimelech’s servants had taken by force from Abraham’s servants. “This is the first I’ve heard of it,” Abimelech answered. “I have no idea who is responsible. You have never complained about this before.”

- Abraham, having sworn allegiance and put Abimelech in a position of strength, asks him “for a favour”
- Abimelech counters with “I had no knowledge of that event”
- Water – our water ban – importance of water in that time and place – if you didn’t find it, you didn’t have it, and if you didn’t have it, you had to find it, and if you couldn’t find it, you died
- Abraham is so desperate for water AND peace that he is digging wells on land that isn’t even his – he’s only squatting on – it would be like renting a house and doing renovations in it at your own expense, that one day you know you’re going to have to leave behind
-

Abraham then gave some of his sheep, goats, and cattle to Abimelech, and they made a treaty. But Abraham also took seven additional female lambs and set them off by themselves. Abimelech asked, “Why have you set these seven apart from the others?” Abraham replied, “Please accept these seven lambs to show your agreement that I dug this well.” Then he named the place Beersheba (which means “well of the oath”), because that was where they had sworn the oath.

- They make a deal, but not before Abraham puts Abimelech under obligation by putting in more value to the deal they are brokering – their mutual nonaggression pact – and he obligates Abimelech into accepting the terms – which is water rights for Abraham

After making their covenant at Beersheba, Abimelech left with Phicol, the commander of his army, and they returned home to the land of the Philistines. Then Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba, and there he worshiped the Lord, the Eternal God. And Abraham lived as a foreigner in Philistine country for a long time. Gen 21:22-34, NLT



- Abraham could have spent the years he lived in the Negev desert being angry with God, demanding that the promises be kept, and NOW
- During this time he's raising Isaac – and his son is watching his life closely, to know more about this God that his father is so careful to try to follow
- If Abraham despises his life during this time, what does Isaac come away with? What's HIS "bigger picture"?
- Does Abraham want to wander? YES Does he want all of God's promises right now? YES
- And yet, he plants a tree – signifying that he's living as if he's going to be there a long time – he takes the long view
- There's a Chinese Proverb that says "The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The next best time is now" – there's another quote that says "The true meaning of life is to plant trees, under whose shade you do not expect to sit" ~Nelson Henderson
- Abraham is at Beersheba – the bottom end of the Promised Land (from Dan to Beersheba) – on the edge of what God has promised, but on the outside looking in, living in uneasy peace with the Philistines (the ancestors of the Gaza Strip) – and he's there for a loooooooooooooong time – he has the child of promise, it seems like everything is lined up, he's done everything God has wanted him to do – and yet there he is, watching his tree grow a little more year after year, on the backside of the Promised Land with nothing to do but watch and wait – and worship

Eternal God

- Talk about eternal - Define eternal – constancy, forever, without beginning or end, unchanging, etc.
- Look at it each way it describes God and contrasts him with our own lives
- Definition idea of being outside time – parade where we are in it, but he sees it from way back, beginning to end

- “Taking the long view” – instead of a desire to get out of your life, deciding to live it to the fullest and make the most of it for God – instead of wanting out of where you are, or spending your life “pulling on the golden thread”, it is finding ways to worship God within your life, with and for what you have (instead of wishing for what you don’t have) – it’s cultivating a life of gratitude and taking the long view
- Video – “Click” Adam Sandler’s movie with the remote control? Fast forward?
- People get obsessed with the end because they’re not satisfied with “the middle” – where their lives are right now
- Abraham refused to do that, for the sake of his son Isaac – he had to content himself with following the Eternal God, with giving his years to the Timeless one
- When I do weddings, I think about how timeless they are – this is something that has been going on for as long as there have been people
- And yet, each one is different, each couple is different – sharing the same hopes and dreams
- We need to find the “sweet spot” in our lives, where our ambition is seasoned with contentment, where we enjoy each moment we live and we live it before God as worship to Him – because each one of our moments is a gift from the Eternal God, who lives outside time
- Ironically, the one who is least affected by time proves to value it the most – because He is always at work inside time, achieving his own ends and leading us towards Himself

Key Thought:

The eternal God of Abraham still controls history and can be trusted with our futures, too.

Now concerning how and when all this will happen, dear brothers and sisters, we don’t really need to write you. For you know quite well that the day of the Lord’s return will come unexpectedly, like a thief in the night. When people are saying, “Everything is peaceful and secure,” then disaster will fall on them as suddenly as a pregnant woman’s labour pains begin. And there will be no escape.

But you aren’t in the dark about these things, dear brothers and sisters, and you won’t be surprised when the day of the Lord comes like a thief. For you are all children of the light and of the day; we don’t belong to darkness and night. So be on your guard, not asleep like the others. Stay alert and be clearheaded. Night is the time when people sleep and drinkers get drunk. But let us who live in the light be clearheaded, protected by the armour of faith and love, and wearing as our helmet the confidence of our salvation.

For God chose to save us through our Lord Jesus Christ, not to pour out his anger on us. Christ died for us so that, whether we are dead or alive when he returns, we can live with him forever. So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.

I Thessalonians 5:1-11, NLT

TAKE IT HOME:

The eternal God of Abraham still controls history and can be trusted with our futures, too.

Stay alert and be clearheaded. Night is the time when people sleep and drinkers get drunk. But let us who live in the light be clearheaded, protected by the armour of faith and love, and wearing as our helmet the confidence of our salvation. For God chose to save us through our Lord Jesus Christ, not to pour out his anger on us. Christ died for us so that, whether we are dead or alive when he returns, we can live with him forever. So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing. | **Thessalonians 5:1-11, NLT**



Conclusion: “The Magic Thread” (paraphrase)

The Magic Thread

Too often, people want what they want (or what they think they want, which is usually "happiness" in one form or another) right now. The irony of their impatience is that only by learning to wait, and by a willingness to accept the bad with the good, do we usually attain those things that are truly worthwhile. "He that can have patience, can have what he will," Benjamin Franklin told us, and this French tale bears him out.

Once there was a widow who had a son called Peter. He was a strong, able boy, but he did not enjoy going to school and he was forever daydreaming.

"Peter, what are you dreaming about this time?" his teacher would say to him.

"I'm thinking about what I'll be when I grow up," Peter replied.

"Be patient. There's plenty of time for that. Being grown up isn't all fun, you know," his teacher said.

But Peter found it hard to enjoy whatever he was doing at the moment, and was always hankering after the next thing. In winter he longed for it to be summer again, and in summer he looked forward to the skating, sledging, and warm fires of winter. At school he would long for the day to be over so that he could go home, and on Sunday nights he would sigh, "If only the holidays would come." What he enjoyed most was playing with his friend Liese. She was as good a companion as any boy, and no matter how impatient Peter was, she never took offense. "When I grow up, I shall marry Liese," Peter said to himself.

Often he wandered through the forest, dreaming of the future. Sometimes he lay down on the soft forest floor in the warm sun, his hands behind his head, staring up at the sky through the distant treetops. One hot afternoon as he began to grow sleepy, he heard someone calling his name. He opened his eyes and sat up. Standing before him was an old woman. In her hand she held a silver ball, from which dangled a silken golden thread.

"See what I have got here, Peter," she said, offering the ball to him.

"What is it?" he asked curiously, touching the fine golden thread.

"This is your life thread," the old woman replied. "Do not touch it and time will pass normally. But if you wish time to pass more quickly, you have only to pull the thread a little way and an hour will pass like a second. But I warn you, once the thread has been pulled out, it cannot be pushed back in again. It will disappear like a puff of smoke. The ball is for you. But if you accept my gift you must tell no one, or on that very day you shall die. Now, say, do you want it?"

Peter seized the gift from her joyfully. It was just what he wanted. He examined the silver ball. It was light and solid, made of a single piece. The only flaw in it was the tiny hole from which the bright thread hung. He put the ball in his pocket and ran home. There, making sure that his mother was out, he examined it again. The thread seemed to be creeping very slowly out of the ball, so slowly that it was scarcely noticeable to the naked eye. He longed to give it a quick tug, but dared not do so. Not yet.

The following day at school, Peter sat daydreaming about what he would do with his magic thread. The teacher scolded him for not concentrating on his work. If only, he thought, it was time to go home. Then he felt the silver ball in his pocket. If he pulled out a tiny bit of thread, the day would be over. Very carefully he took hold of it and tugged. Suddenly the teacher was telling everyone to pack up their books and to leave the classroom in an orderly fashion. Peter was overjoyed. He ran all the way home. How easy life would be now! All his troubles were over. From that day forth he began to pull the thread, just a little, every day.

One day, however, it occurred to him that it was stupid to pull the thread just a little each day. If he gave it a harder tug, school would be over altogether. Then he could start learning a trade and marry Liese. So that night he gave the thread a hard tug, and in the morning he awoke to find himself apprenticed to a carpenter in town. He loved his new life, clambering about on roofs and scaffolding, lifting and hammering great beams into place that still smelled of the forest. But sometimes, when payday seemed too far off, he gave the thread a little tug and suddenly the week was drawing to a close and it was Friday night and he had money in his pocket.

Liese had also come to town and was living with her aunt, who taught her housekeeping. Peter began to grow impatient for the day when they would be married. It was hard to live so near and yet so far from her. He asked her when they could be married.

"In another year," she said. "Then I will have learned how to be a capable wife."

Peter fingered the silver ball in his pocket.

"Well, the time will pass quickly enough," he said, knowingly.

That night Peter could not sleep. He tossed and turned restlessly. He took the magic ball from under his pillow. For a moment he hesitated; then his impatience got the better of him, and he tugged at the golden thread. In the morning he awoke to find that the year was over and that Liese had at last agreed to marry him. Now Peter felt truly happy.

But before their wedding could take place, Peter received an official-looking letter. He opened it in trepidation and read that he was expected to report at the army barracks the following week for two years' military service. He showed the letter to Liese in despair.

"Well," she said, "there is nothing for it, we shall just have to wait. But the time will pass quickly, you'll see. There are so many things to do in preparation for our life together."

Peter smiled bravely, knowing that two years would seem a lifetime to him.

Once Peter had settled into life at the barracks, however, he began to feel that it wasn't so bad after all. He quite enjoyed being with all the other young men, and their duties were not very arduous at first. He remembered the old woman's warning to use the thread wisely and for a while refrained from pulling it. But in time he grew restless again. Army life bored him with its routine duties and harsh discipline. He began pulling the thread to make the week go faster so that it would be Sunday again, or to speed up the time until he was due for leave. And so the two years passed almost as if they had been a dream.

Back home, Peter determined not to pull the thread again until it was absolutely necessary. After all, this was the best time of his life, as everyone told him. He did not want it to be over too quickly. He did, however, give the thread one or two very small tugs, just to speed along the day of his marriage. He longed to tell Liese his secret, but he knew that if he did he would die.

On the day of his wedding, everyone, including Peter, was happy. He could hardly wait to show Liese the house he had built for her. At the wedding feast he glanced over at his mother. He noticed for the first time how gray her hair had grown recently. She seemed to be aging so quickly. Peter felt a pang of guilt that he had pulled the thread so often. Henceforward he would be much more sparing with it and only use it when it was strictly necessary.

A few months later Liese announced that she was going to have a child. Peter was overjoyed and could hardly wait. When the child was born, he felt that he could never want for anything again. But whenever the child was ill or cried through the sleepless night, he gave the thread a little tug, just so that the baby might be well and happy again.

Times were hard. Business was bad and a government had come to power that squeezed the people dry with taxes and would tolerate no opposition. Anyone who became known as a troublemaker was thrown into prison without trial and rumor was enough to condemn a man. Peter had always been known as one who spoke his mind, and very soon he was arrested and cast into jail. Luckily he had his magic ball with him and he

tugged very hard at the thread. The prison walls dissolved before him and his enemies were scattered in the huge explosion that burst forth like thunder. It was the war that had been threatening, but it was over as quickly as a summer storm, leaving behind it an exhausted peace. Peter found himself back home with his family. But now he was a middle-aged man.

For a time things went well and Peter lived in relative contentment. One day he looked at his magic ball and saw to his surprise that the thread had turned from gold to silver. He looked in the mirror. His hair was starting to turn gray and his face was lined where before there had not been a wrinkle to be seen. He suddenly felt afraid and determined to use the thread even more carefully than before. Liese bore him more children and he seemed happy as the head of his growing household. His stately manner often made people think of him as some sort of benevolent ruler. He had an air of authority as if he held the fate of others in his hands. He kept his magic ball in a well-hidden place, safe from the curious eyes of his children, knowing that if anyone were to discover it, it would be fatal.

As the number of his children grew, so his house became more overcrowded. He would have to extend it, but for that he needed money. He had other worries too. His mother was looking older and more tired every day. It was of no use to pull the magic thread because that would only hasten her approaching death. All too soon she died, and as Peter stood at her graveside, he wondered how it was that life passed so quickly, even without pulling the magic thread.

One night as he lay in bed, kept awake by his worries, he thought how much easier life would be if all his children were grown up and launched upon their careers in life. He gave the thread a mighty tug, and the following day he awoke to find that his children had all left home for jobs in different parts of the country, and that he and his wife were alone. His hair was almost white now and often his back and limbs ached as he climbed the ladder or lifted a heavy beam into place. Liese too was getting old and she was often ill. He couldn't bear to see her suffer, so that more and more he resorted to pulling at the magic thread. But as soon as one trouble was solved, another seemed to grow in its place. Perhaps life would be easier if he retired, Peter thought. Then he would no longer have to clamber about on drafty, half-completed buildings and he could look after Liese when she was ill. The trouble was that he didn't have enough money to live on. He picked up his magic ball and looked at it. To his dismay he saw that the thread was no longer silver but gray and lusterless. He decided to go for a walk in the forest to think things over.

It was a long time since he had been in that part of the forest. The small saplings had all grown into tall fir trees, and it was hard to find the path he had once known. Eventually he came to a bench in a clearing. He sat down to rest and fell into a light doze. He was woken by someone calling his name, "Peter! Peter!"

He looked up and saw the old woman he had met so many years ago when she had given him the magic silver ball with its golden thread. She looked just as she had on that day, not a day older. She smiled at him.

"So, Peter, have you had a good life?" she asked.

"I'm not sure," Peter said. "Your magic ball is a wonderful thing. I have never had to suffer or wait for anything in my life. And yet it has all passed so quickly. I feel that I have had no time to take in what has happened to me, neither the good things nor the bad. Now there is so little time left. I dare not pull the thread again for it will only bring me to my death. I do not think your gift has brought me luck."

"How ungrateful you are!" the old woman said. "In what way would you have wished things to be different?"

"Perhaps if you had given me a different ball, one where I could have pushed the thread back in as well as pulling it out. Then I could have relived the things that went badly."

The old woman laughed. "You ask a great deal! Do you think that God allows us to live our lives twice over? But I can grant you one final wish, you foolish, demanding man."

"What is that?" Peter asked.

"Choose," the old woman said. Peter thought hard.

At length he said, "I should like to live my life again as if for the first time, but without your magic ball. Then I will experience the bad things as well as the good without cutting them short, and at least my life will not pass as swiftly and meaninglessly as a daydream."

"So be it," said the old woman. "Give me back my ball."

She stretched out her hand and Peter placed the silver ball in it. Then he sat back and closed his eyes with exhaustion.

When he awoke he was in his own bed. His youthful mother was bending over him, shaking him gently.

"Wake up, Peter. You will be late for school. You were sleeping like the dead!"

He looked up at her in surprise and relief.

"I've had a terrible dream, Mother. I dreamed that I was old and sick and that my life had passed like the blinking of an eye with nothing to show for it. Not even any memories."

His mother laughed and shook her head.

"That will never happen," she said. "Memories are the one thing we all have, even when we are old. Now hurry and get dressed. Liese is waiting for you and you will be late for school."

As Peter walked to school with Liese, he noticed what a bright summer morning it was, the kind of morning when it felt good to be alive. Soon he would see his friends and classmates, and even the prospect of lessons didn't seem so bad. In fact he could hardly wait.

Anonymous - excerpted from The Book of Virtues by William J. Bennett

- One life to live, one shot, one time around – and what are we doing with it?
- The eternal God longs to see us understand our too-brief time here and help us to make the most of it

Response: “Take It All” (band)